# AN ADVENTURER IN EXILE

RICHARD DUFFY

Dorothy Gowin

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# AN ADVENTURE IN EXILE

*A SENTIMENTAL COMEDY*

By RICHARD DUFFY

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*DILECTISSIMAE*

# CHAPTER I

## DISTURBING ECHOES

As an after-dinner entertainment that evening at her house in the Avenue Montaigne, Mme. de Guerville had provided a Polish pianist. The celebrity condescended to be presented to the guests, seated himself at the piano, and, with a preliminary thrust of long, bony fingers through his oily black hair, attacked the keyboard ferociously.

Lloyd Avery, one of the few Americans there, remained standing at the threshold of the room, airy and luxurious in its long stretch of white and gold. At a convenient opportunity he signaled a glance to his hostess, then withdrew on tiptoe to a little room off the main apartment. Through the open window spring's soft night wind came as

a summons to joy in living. A chair was on the balcony. He sat down to smoke a cigarette and watch musingly cabs and carriages hurrying by with their great eyes of light.

Ten years had passed since before he sat and smoked thus over Paris *qui s'amuse et qui s'ennuie*. It was all the same, at once very young and very old. He himself was unchanged, he felt regretfully; although when about to sail he had fancied he was quite another man. As he looked at the city then, he looked at it now. The longer he sat looking, the more cigarettes he smoked; the longer he lived, the more cigarettes he smoked. *Et plus rien!*

His black hair was streaked with gray at the temples. He reflected, with somewhat of a wince, that he had often been vain of this premature grayness. Women had remarked it flatteringly. All men are vain of gray hairs at thirty, especially when the hairs are next the temples. It is one of the obvious flatteries of an interested woman to remark them. A sen-

tence he had read came back to him: "According to the women he has known shall a man be philosopher or fool." The lines of his shaven, well-molded face were firmer now. The lips, formerly full and curving, were habitually compressed. In his eyes was the dusk of weariness.

"Margery Herbert promised to be here."

The line, flotsam of the flow of subdued conversation in the room behind him, startled echoes in his memory. Disturbing echoes they were. He shrugged his shoulders slowly and uncomfortably. He dropped his cigarette and trod upon it. What a small world it was, after all!

A fan, laid almost impalpably on his shoulder, interrupted the reverie. He rose so quickly the feathers of the fan grazed his cheek, loosing a store of faint fragrance.

Mme. de Guerville, the hostess, stood before him—tall, fair, slender, and in her filmy gown of a loveliness charmingly fragile.

"I tried to steal away sooner, but it was difficult."

She spoke in English, with a slight French accent. Though an American by birth, she had spent only the school years in her country.

"I wouldn't have signaled to you, Eleanor," he replied, "but I am leaving Paris to-night."

"My dear Lloyd, absurd—quite absurd!"

"Many things I do are absurd."

"But you've been here only two weeks; and this is the second time I've seen you!"

"I explained——"

"Very well—and I forgave you." She resumed French abruptly, as if the easier medium. "But you can't go away at the climax of the season, when Paris is about to have two royal visits."

"My idea in coming over was to get away from things."

"Then, my dear Lloyd," she returned smiling, "you've come just to the wrong place. Besides, Paul will return from London on Monday; at the latest, Tues-

day. He took the boys over for an outing. When he's here again he'll take you round to the clubs, the little theaters, and all the places you took him to long ago, before we were married."

"I remember," said Lloyd, smiling, and picking his way with a trace of hesitation in French, though his accent was easy and natural. "It was supposed that I took Paul everywhere. Well, if I did, he gave me a very good time, and he's the best of husbands notwithstanding. I've just been thinking of those days."

"Remorse is your malady. You know you ought to be one of the best of husbands yourself. You ought to have a wife, a home——"

"You mean something besides myself to worry about."

"And I had the sweetest of girls chosen for you, if you had only remained in Paris. Do you remember Stéphanie ? I wrote to you about her."

"The little schoolgirl who said she was going to marry an American millionaire,

because he would be worth five times as much as a French one?"

"I never would have thought you'd remember her."

"Not being a millionaire, I counted myself out at once. Perhaps that's why I remember."

"She married a French one, after all, and has had a very unhappy time of it."

"Divorce?"

"I wish she would divorce him," Mme. de Guerville replied, with feeling. "He has given her cause enough. He is what you call in English a 'rotter.' She was such a white little soul, too."

"Perhaps the white little soul is fascinated by this terrible man," Lloyd said, smiling at Mme. de Guerville's evident convictions.

She was silent for a moment, then said indulgently:

"You still affect cynicism, my dear friend; and you're really the same young charming——"

"Sentimentalist, you once called me."

"Let me say rather, idealist."

Lloyd laughed. "Then I must seem to you to have improved."

"I thought, then"—she spoke deliberately—"I still think that you are the man Stéphanie ought to have married. And you ought to marry her."

He laughed.

"But, my dear Eleanor, you say she *is* married. Now *you* are trying to pose as cynical."

"I'm not posing. I *am* cynical. People think nowadays that only men are primitive in their instincts. They are when they are fighting with money, or with politics, among themselves. Otherwise they are conventional as biscuits. Just see the way they dress. No hat, no dress is too barbarous for a woman; and believe me, in most cases the original woman is under that hat and that dress."

Lloyd smiled. "Under what dress is the original woman who answers to the name of Stéphanie here to-night?" he asked jestingly. "To be candid, Eleanor, not many of them look original, but they all look interesting."

"That's just it," she said. "She's not here. If she only would come out of that country desert, where she lives like St. Elizabeth among her poor, one might——"

"But if she's down there where she prefers to be, and with her husband——"

"He's never there. He is nearly always where he should not be in Paris, and people talk so much that she shrinks from meeting any one."

"Well, I'm very sorry, Eleanor, that a friend of yours should be so unhappy, but I see nothing I can do." He smiled at her as an old friend.

"At least you ought to marry somebody," she retorted.

"My dear Eleanor," he said, "of all the illogical things you have ever said, that is the most fascinating. I shall never forget it."

"You must not laugh at it," she warned him. "I'm willing to admit I am five years your senior, and have been married ten, to prove I am right."

of embarrassment became less bearable with each ticking sound.

Of all women Lloyd Avery wished least to meet, and might least have expected to meet in Paris at this time, and in this house, Margery Herbert was the one.

## CHAPTER II

### A PREMATURE ADIEU

"I HEARD that you had gone to California—or some place out West," she said at length, in a weak effort to be conventional in tone.

"I changed my mind at the last minute."

"The doctor advised Marienbad for mother," she volunteered. "We came over unexpectedly, too."

He said nothing in reply. He was wishing she would speak of their departure for the health resort. Yet, why should he desire to know this? Was not he leaving Paris that night?

Mrs. Herbert read his perplexity obscurely. She laughed and said: "At our previous meeting, which we agreed was to be our last, we should also have agreed

on what we would say to each other when we met again."

"That's nearly a year and a half ago, isn't it?"

"As long as that, Lloyd?" The name slipped inadvertently, it seemed.

He looked up surprised. Her head was prettily poised as she seemed to be reflecting on the interval elapsed. He noted with the pleasure of rediscovered beauties her long, curving lashes, her sensitive nostrils. Yet his outward air was plainly that of discomposure.

An offensive suspicion assailed her mind that not even her personal endowment invited his interest. People who had strolled from the other room were within ear-shot of them; and Mrs. Herbert had not been too preoccupied with Lloyd Avery to miss observant glances, directed by the women at her gown and jewels, by the men at herself.

"They're crowding in here," he said. "Shall we go to the balcony?"

"On second thought," Mrs. Herbert replied, with an inscrutable smile, "I think

it is much better that we did not agree on what we would say to each other at this meeting. It seems so hard to find anything to say, even under stress of the occasion. Don't you think so?"

"Do you mean that *you* think so?"

"I'm not on the witness-stand, you know; and besides, I'm anxious to meet the pianist. Will you take me in?"

He was tall, well-proportioned, and carried himself with easy erectness. As they entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Herbert basked in the satisfaction a handsome woman has in a worthy escort, though all her former vexation at the perversity of his temperament was reawakened.

Nor was it of solace to recall that she had once said to him, in animated talk, he had been spoiled by the attention of women. She did not tell him that this verdict from a woman who had known him before her marriage, and who had had no patience with him after, was her own stimulus to riper acquaintanceship with him. But this with no design of flattering him into notice; she wished merely to ap-

pease her curiosity. Moreover, at the expiration of her close term of widowhood, in her idle and unattached condition, she found herself the prey of obnoxious and tiresome suitors. An irreverent had said of her: "She has looks, youth, money, and little trace of the maternal instinct—she was born to be a widow."

Mrs. Herbert's little excursion to rummage the contents of Lloyd Avery's soul had availed her immunity from undesirable devotees, and had involved, to her surprise and dismay, revelations of her own. Instead of meeting with the reverence she believed hers by right and title of her sex, the man had actually dared to seem neglectful. Then, the last farewell, for which, it was her bitter-sweet recollection, he was quite unprepared. It was a blustery winter day. He came in, pinched in feature and thoroughly chilled, despite his fur coat. She was sitting before a log fire, deliciously at ease in a low, deep chair. Her dress, she knew, was flawless, though she did not expect him to be aware of it, except in so far as it expressed her-

self. Even on this occasion he disappointed her with his calm, correct manner, his "suppressed feeling," as she called it.

She had wandered so far from the present that she turned with a start on hearing him say:

"There's a man bowing to you. He's coming over."

A good-looking young Frenchman with glossy, carefully brushed black hair and a delicately nurtured mustache came up to them. Admiration shone in his eyes as he took Mrs. Herbert's hand and raised it gracefully to his lips.

"The most beautiful woman here," he murmured.

"Only here?" she questioned with a smile for him, and for whatever eyes might be upon her.

"Everywhere!" the ardent youth answered devoutly.

Lloyd assured himself that the Frenchman was captivated, at least temporarily.

Mrs. Herbert introduced the men.

"The family of M. de Fesnières and I are old friends," she explained to the

American. "You know, Victor, I meant to run in to see your mother on my way here, but I was late and I didn't like to risk my promised introduction to the celebrity. What a hero-worshiper I am!" She laughed softly.

Lloyd watched the light rise in the eyes of de Fesnières.

"I'll present you if you like," de Fesnières proposed. "He's over there with some friends of mine now. Come, Mr. Avery."

"Will you excuse me, and accept my thanks at the same time?" said Lloyd. "I'm leaving Paris to-night, and I must——"

"Is it possible?" de Fesnières inquired, with hardly the faintest show of interest.

"Are you?" Mrs. Herbert asked quickly, though only the politest concern was to be read in her features.

"I see Mme. de Guerville is to be free for a moment, so I shall wish her good-night."

The men shook hands.

"Good-night, Mrs. Herbert. Will you

give my best wishes to your mother, please?" he added.

She extended her hand cordially. "Thank you, I shall. Good-by."

Lloyd chose not to look into the blue eyes of long, curving lashes as he turned away to overtake Mme. de Guerville, who was going out of the room. She led him to the balconied window where she had found him sitting before.

"I must go now, Eleanor," he said, offering his hand.

"Supper will be ready shortly. Wait——"

"My train leaves at eleven-thirty," he interposed, glancing at his watch.

"My dear Lloyd, I thought we had agreed that you were not to go to-night?" She smiled archly.

"Always a cunning diplomat, aren't you? But——"

"Listen, Lloyd. You remember Mrs. Herbert to whom I presented you to-night?"

"Yes, I——"

"Pardon. She's here with an ailing,

whimsical mother, who doesn't allow her to have a bit of a good time. I told her that I wanted her surely for luncheon to-morrow, to meet a New York man I knew she would like. You see, she wasn't sure she could be here to-night."

Lloyd was silent for an instant, then rejoined quietly:

"Mrs. Herbert and I have met before. More than a year ago."

"Then you've got to come to luncheon. She'll know you were the man I meant."

"I'm sorry, but I feel I must go to-night."

"Well, where in the world are you going, that it's so important?"

"Oh, I've leased a house down in Normandy, a château, the agent calls it. I'm going back to my old job."

"You mean to paint?"

"I mean to try, anyway."

"Do you intend to live there all alone?"

"For a while, anyway. Randolph Cooper, a chum of mine, is coming to join me, in the course of a few weeks. We shall keep bachelors' hall."

"But, my dear Lloyd, you can go there any time. Besides, you will find it much better to travel on a day train. Our trains and yours—you know."

"Still——" he objected with a suspicion of firmness.

Mme. de Guerville's blue eyes flashed with a new light. "Oh, of course if you don't care to come—you say you've met her before, about a year ago——"

The flight of her thoughts alarmed him.

"Now, don't begin to have intuitions," he said with alacrity; and he hoped that his smile was sufficiently unforced to clear her mind.

"Then, you'll be at luncheon?" she said promptly.

"I'll be glad to come," he responded, with the proper degree of pleasure in his tone; "but I must go over to the hotel now to countermand my previous arrangements."

An hour later, while Mrs. Herbert and her maid were being driven to her hotel, she meditated in puzzled mood on what Eleanor de Guerville said at the moment

of their hurried good-night: "You've not forgotten luncheon to-morrow? Mr. Avery will be here. He told me you had met in New York."

It was on the tip of Mrs. Herbert's tongue to ask why he had changed his plans to leave Paris that night. But Eleanor might think she had a special interest in Mr. Avery's doings. Moreover, departing guests were flocked thickly about. She stifled her inquiry and, in her preoccupation of mind, kissed and bade her hostess good-night for the second time.

Mrs. Herbert recalled the casual invitation of the day before, when Eleanor spoke of a New York man who was to be present at the luncheon. She had given little expectation to the meeting of this vague personage, in the multiplicity of engagements that busied her one month in Paris. Now she wondered what would have been her fancies, on the way to Mme. de Guerville's earlier in the evening, had she known she was about to confront Lloyd Avery. Since their farewell she had

been almost constantly away from New York, accompanying her mother in the restless search for health. In their divergent journeyings she had often pondered on what she might feel if she knew she were to see him again.

To-night, of one thing she was persuaded: she would not have worn this dress. She remembered, too, his severe distaste for jewels. His preferences were very odd, but they were his own. He did not admire easily, wherein he was different from the majority of men. It was one of the few interesting points in his make-up. After all, not a brilliant specimen, though clever in his way; and scarcely of attraction, save in curiosity, to a handsome woman on whom admiration had begun to pall.

A vase of roses stood on her dressing-table. They had been sent by Victor de Fesnières that afternoon. Mrs. Herbert instructed the maid to put them in the sitting-room, murmuring to herself as she gave an instant's thought to the donor: "Such a nice, simple boy!"

Before retiring she selected the gown she would wear at luncheon the next day.

Meanwhile, Victor de Fesnières had gone home thrilling with the recollection of Mrs. Herbert's light, cheerful voice. Her eyes haunted him, and the smile she bestowed as they said good-night to each other moved him to sit up till two o'clock, writing a wildly amorous sonnet. He was gloriously happy in the thought that he should see her on the morrow at Mme. de Guerville's luncheon.

In his room at the hotel, Lloyd sat up very late and smoked cigarettes of disquiet, not of ennui, such as he had smoked a few hours before. The whole idyllic scheme of his journey to France in search of summer peace and replenishment had been intruded on. Eleanor de Guerville's earnest counsel that he should marry was disturbing even though it was ridiculous. The least susceptible man, who feels himself on the right road to bachelorhood, must pause to reconsider under the circumstances. Eleanor and her husband were among the truest of his

friends. Her wild notion that there was a possibility of his marrying a woman not yet free to marry only revealed the depth of her convictions. Still, all happily married women, he thought, are eager matchmakers.

In a day or two he would be in tranquil retreat in Normandy. Yet, for tomorrow he had promised to meet Margery Herbert at luncheon.

Was there any way out of the engagement? He could think of three excuses, but all three, or any single one, would only make Eleanor suspect he was too anxious not to appear. He went to bed miserably decided not to keep the engagement, and wondered why he had ever thought himself a free man.

Suppose Eleanor should seize on Margery Herbert as the woman for him? From the way she had aired her opinions, apparently any marriageable, or nearly marriageable, woman should do. Long months ago it had seemed to him that he would marry Margery. Was he a fool to imagine now, as he had once imagined,

that she would have him? He smiled at himself for the conceit his meditations suggested. When he got to sleep at last, it was to dream all night that he was being pursued by strange creatures whose like he had never seen, and whose endurance he could not comprehend.

Before Eleanor de Guerville retired that night, as was her habit, she wrote a long letter to her husband, detailing her day. She told enthusiastically of her success with the Polish pianist, a most difficult acquisition, and hinted guardedly that she had found a woman who should prove a good wife for Lloyd Avery. They had known each other in New York, and she was sure they had been interested. How deeply, of course, she could not say. They were to meet at luncheon on the morrow, and——

So in all Paris that night, where the unending drama of life and of death, of joy and of woe, was being enacted with its customary shock, four people were looking forward to the next day's luncheon as a moment of vast importance.

## CHAPTER III

### MARRIAGE PERIL

THE first quarter of the noon hour had waned when Mrs. Herbert rode away from the hotel. The golden brown shade of her plain gown and hat harmonized with the rich tone of her hair. She was one of the fortunate women who look well either in severe or in ornate attire.

It was her intention to spend a few moments, on the way, in a visit to Mme. de Fesnières. She found Victor's stately mother gloomy and depressed, a condition not unusual. Mme. de Fesnières suffered from a weak heart, which, as years whitened her proudly poised head, chilled her with foreboding. In Mrs. Herbert she avowed she had sources of consolation and comfort, due to the American's experiences with a chronic invalid, her mother.

Then, Mme. de Fesnières believed that much of her life had been spoiled in the lot of her children. To-day she was despondent on this point.

Her daughter, Mme. Letuire, had rashly made a love-match almost before the mother had begun to think it time to arrange a marriage. The husband was rarely seen now, and spoken of only in confidential tones. The dignified old woman had received an unhealing wound from this malicious blow of destiny; worse, she had a morbid dread lest Victor, so impulsive, so innocent of the world, should stumble into similar error. She was endeavoring to compass a most desirable match for him, but there were obstacles, not insuperable, to be sure, yet which time alone could remove. And this was a perilous period for Victor, so impulsive, so innocent of the world.

"Knowing Mme. de Guerville so well," explained Victor's mother, "you may have heard her mention Stéphanie, a remote kinswoman of ours, who is married to a man that ought to be dead."

Mme. de Fesnières pronounced sentence with cold precision.

"She has never had less than degradation at his hands, though we all thought when they married, he seemed so deeply in love with her, that he would try at least to be worthy of her.

"He is one of those wonderfully pleasing men who leave only ruin in their path. We all believed it was weakness and lack of training, defects most women feel they must accept and remedy. We know now that he is hopelessly bad; but Stéphanie will not divorce him. I can't imagine what makes the child so old-fashioned. Divorce is repulsive, yet it is the scientific operation for just such a social cancer as he is.

"They had not been married six months when Stéphanie decided to live in the country, and let him go his way in Paris, London, wherever he should prefer. The poor girl is so ashamed that she never dares to come to town except secretly. The pity of it is that she of all women is

the one to make Victor happy, and I am sure he would be a good husband to her."

"As long as she remains married," said Mrs. Herbert, feeling the luncheon-hour approaching swiftly, "Victor can hardly entertain the idea, can he?"

"Naturally. The danger is that Victor may fall in love with some woman, any woman. He was fond of Stéphanie before she married, but she, poor child, must have been quite hypnotized by De Lescure."

"It's all quite unhappy, isn't it?" Mrs. Herbert remarked, thinking of the ticking clock on the mantelpiece and of the luncheon at which she was to see Lloyd Avery again.

She wished to reach Mme. de Guerville's house before he got there, to learn, if it could be learned adroitly, why he had not followed his original purpose of leaving Paris the night before.

"And as I have told you, my dear friend, Victor is such a boy, and this Paris of ours so dangerous for attractive men,

that I would like you, as an old friend, to keep an eye on him when you can."

Mrs. Herbert remembered all this as the mother's familiar portrait of her son. She remembered also some of Victor's well-turned compliments. Hardly boyish they were; but, she argued within herself, French young men are so much more precocious about women than Americans.

"You may be sure," said Mrs. Herbert, "I shall do all for Victor that you, his mother, my old friend, could wish done."

"Of course, he must not suspect that I have talked with you," added Mme. de Fesnières.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Herbert.

"Thank you, thank you, from my heart," said Mme. de Fesnières warmly. "Alas! I do not go out any more, or I should not be obliged to force my worries on you. Still, when the summer is here, and we are at Trouville, I intend to entertain a little—very quietly. I shall have Stéphanie for a fortnight at least. Will

you and your mother also come to see me? Ah, you will like Stéphanie. She is that rare type of woman—like yourself—whom women like as well as men."

Mme. de Fesnières rose, as Mrs. Herbert rose to go, and kissed her with dignified affection.

With an apology for not waiting to hear out Mme. de Fesnières's prolix declarations of gratitude, Mrs. Herbert hastened from the room.

Why had Lloyd Avery changed his plan of leaving Paris? So her thoughts ran.

Going down the stairs, she quickened her pace, and as the door was opened for her to pass out, saw Victor standing on the lower step of the entrance. His eyes brightened at sight of her.

"I hadn't any idea you were here," he cried, after greeting her with extreme cordiality.

She explained her visit in passing.

He smiled happily. "I'm going to that luncheon," he said; "I was just starting."

Although her deeper thoughts had been

quite remote from the anxieties of Mme. de Fesnières during the call, Mrs. Herbert's generous impulses had been awakened. In her heart, she told herself, there beat for Victor a wave of sympathy almost maternal in character. The self-addressed remark with which she had sent his roses from her dressing-room the past night, recurred to her: "A nice, simple boy." For that, after all, was Victor, despite his apparent facility in the manners and phrases of a cavalier. Yet she was gratified that she had not worn the roses. Misinterpretation is so obvious.

She invited Victor to share her coupé, as long as they were both going to Mme. de Guerville's. Her voice and eyes were friendly and considerate. He had never seemed quite so young to her. Had not his mother and she been discussing him, only a moment ago, as though they both had the same perspective?

"We've only got fifteen minutes to reach Eleanor's house," said Mrs. Herbert, "and it's quite some distance."

"I wish we had an hour to go," Victor returned.

Mrs. Herbert laughed. "I'm frank to say I couldn't wait so long for something to eat," she confessed.

"I'm hungry, too," Victor chimed. "Say we cut the luncheon and stop at the first good restaurant?"

"Is that the way you break engagements?"

"I should break any engagement to be with you," he declared.

Mrs. Herbert, surprised, looked at Victor, then, startled at an expression in the depths of his brilliant black eyes, she quickly turned and gazed out of the window.

"We're going to have rain, I think," she said flatly.

For a few moments no words passed between them.

"Won't you have luncheon with me?" he asked, leaning forward to see her averted face.

"Why, Victor, I'm going to have luncheon with you." She laid her hand gently

on his arm, as she fancied his mother might, and smiled at him with what she thought a middle-aged maternal softness.

She was wondering, meanwhile, whether it would have occurred to Eleanor to seat her next to Lloyd Avery.

Victor remained silent, staring out through his window.

She was wishing he would talk, no matter what he said. It was not his way to be silent so long; and as long as he talked, things were clear to her. She was glad that her driver was pushing his horse hard.

What was it that made her begin to count the minutes they still had to go before reaching the house in the Avenue Montaigne? After all, the ominous conversation of Mme. de Fesnières depressed her—made her nervous. She abhorred stories of people unhappily married or of people who might be.

The tension of the silence between them had stretched to the point of snapping.

"Victor," she said at last, and coughed nervously, "I suppose you know your mother is very fond of you."

"And I am fond of her," he rejoined.

"Of course you are, Victor. Now, I have just had a serious talk with her, and I want to say something that really I had thought of myself before——"

"I want to say something to you," he interposed. "Something——"

"Won't you please let me finish——"

The coupé stopped suddenly. Each of them glanced toward the window.

"Are we there?" Mrs. Herbert inquired anxiously.

He was intent on looking through his window. She noted his fine swarthy skin, his profile cut like a Roman medallion, his glossy black hair, and the wonderful mustache, on a man so young, tilted up at the ends like that of William the Second. Victor's chin did not recede, but was just a little too soft and round for a man.

A vision of Lloyd Avery's clean-shaven profile sprang up in her mind. It was less handsome, but more severely noble. Grace and strength seemed not so much to combine in Lloyd's face as to vie with each other. No compliment, however sub-

tle, could find Victor unprepared, she imagined. And she thought, with a wince of fearful admiration, that, compliment or blow, Lloyd Avery would have the same front of address and poise. No man had ever taken a cold denial of hers with the self-mastery Lloyd had shown on that winter day long ago. She knew she was a clever woman. Yet she wondered whether or no there were some men to whom a woman's cleverness was merely a blank cartridge.

"We're being held up at a crossing," Victor explained, turning toward her.

"We'll be late," she said nervously.

She was sure now that she could not see Eleanor before the luncheon.

"Do you mind being late with me?" he asked.

His black eyes shone on hers.

"Of course not," she laughed, to relieve her mind. "I was going to say that your mother sets great store by the marriage you will make, Victor."

"She has spoken to you?" he inquired hopefully.

The coupé started again, at a smart trot.

"We've had a long talk to-day," said Mrs. Herbert, wondering how she should proceed, and forgetting his mother's injunction of confidence.

"Mother is so good and so intelligent," he rejoined.

"And she is very, very fond of you, Victor."

"She has the deepest admiration for you, too," he murmured, with warmth.

"I'm proud of her confidence. No mother, unless she believed in me, could talk of you as she did to-day."

"Poor mother, she has always been afraid I should make a bad marriage, as my sister did."

"Yes. So she said." Mrs. Herbert spoke absently.

She was consoling herself with the expectation of sitting near Lloyd Avery over coffee, in case Eleanor should not have placed her near him at table.

"Then you think she has guessed the secret?" Victor asked.

"Guessed *what?*"

"That I love you, Margery—that I want to marry you!"

Mrs. Herbert jumped in alarm. She was suddenly aware that Victor was showering kisses on her hands and arms.

The coupé drew up so sharply in front of Mme. de Guerville's house that they were both thrown forward on the seat.

The footman pulled the door open.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Herbert had drawn in her arms, shuddering visibly.

They stepped out and walked into the house.

"Say you care just a little—that there is no other man," Victor pleaded.

"I can't talk now," Mrs. Herbert gasped.

She tried to prefigure what Lloyd Avery's expression would be. She could see only Mme. de Fesnières's proud, troubled face. And Victor—what a fascinator he was. She felt like boxing his ears.

## CHAPTER IV

### BUTTERFLIES

Mrs. Herbert would have been disappointed to find herself one of the last to arrive, if every other thought had not been eclipsed by the wholly unexpected avowal of Victor. Wholly unexpected was the phrase of her unuttered description, though her deeper consciousness might have dispensed with the "wholly"; and even, perchance, have queried the "unexpected." Yet, in all tangible evidence, she felt the description to be true.

Everybody would agree with her on this point—everybody except Victor. He, of course, would not admit that he had taken advantage of the confidence her intimacy with his family allowed. This in truth, she reasoned, was what he had done.

From the first she had honestly intend-

ed to be merely good friends with him. That she had appeared as attractive as was easily possible for her could scarcely be held in grave reproach. She was that to all men, as are all women in so far as in them lies. Her real regret was that Victor's mother should have spoken on this day above all of the marriage peril, as though she sought from her American confidante counsel and aid in his defense.

Would Mme. de Fesnières have spoken thus had she had any suspicion of a particular quarter in which danger lay? It was doubtful. Moreover, Mrs. Herbert felt sure that, in view of his mother's ideas about his marriage, Victor, in all his innocence and immaturity, would have had the astuteness not to betray his inclination any sooner than necessary.

All these things her mind had been turning and twisting and rediscovering in new guise, as happens in the futile intervals of inaction. Automatically she had gone through the ceremony of meeting her hostess and the dozen of guests, and had seated herself at table, hardly conscious

of her associate on either side. Neither was Lloyd Avery.

The last words Victor murmured before leaving her, to take his chair, embodied a pleading request that he be permitted to accompany her home. At once she urged in her excuse that she had another engagement directly after the luncheon. Though she could not tell with whom or where she had an engagement, she knew she must not see him again that day.

The sound of Lloyd Avery's well-remembered voice brought her back suddenly to the present.

"The only use of epigrams," he was saying, with the dim suggestion of a smile about his eyes, "is that they enable one to make disagreeable utterances with impunity. No one is dismayed at hearing them, because no one believes them—and only a scant minority understands them."

Faint laughter of acquiescence spread round the table.

Mrs. Herbert had heard him say the same thing on a previous occasion. Her eyes met his pleasantly, however, in the

first personal glance she had given him since they sat down.

Victor de Fesnières inquired: "According to you, then, Mr. Avery, the epigrammatist is an intellectual snob?"

"Perhaps that's so, if by a snob you mean one who can do things we can't afford to do, and has the bad taste to do them."

"Then, if I had money," Mme. de Guerville said demurely, "I am sure I should be an arrant snob. There are so many things I could do."

"I do the best I can with the little I have," Mrs. Herbert added, laughing, and raising a thin-stemmed glass to her lips, whose hue of health vied with the red gleam of the wine.

"I have nevaire learn' the Anglish veree cor-rectly, in spite I have studied him with attention." It was Victor de Fesnières's sister, Mme. Letuire, who spoke. For a woman whose husband was rarely seen, and discussed only in confidence, her mien was singularly free from tragic indication. There was this pecu-

liarity to be noted after observing her: though her vivid black eyes and full pretty mouth bespoke an unusually vivacious disposition, she was contrarily sedate. "For example, the word 'snob,' " she continued; "what he mean in French I know, but in Anglish nevaire."

"One must be a snob to know," Lloyd explained, with a gallant inclination to Mme. Letuire.

"Ah, that is pleesant, M. Aviary," she returned quickly; "but is it, how you say, a fabrication?"

"Oh, no—an inspiration. From the moment I met you, *madame*"—Lloyd swung gracefully into French—"I was sure you could never know what it means to be a snob."

"Suzanne," interposed Mme. de Guerville, smiling, "you are a cynic."

"I am married," replied Suzanne Letuire dryly.

Lloyd Avery was saying something to the woman at his right. She clapped her finger-tips to him to show her appreciation.

"Let us all hear it," cried Mme. de Letuire.

Lloyd bowed to her: "I was remarking that a cynic is only a sentimentalist wrong side out; and a sentimentalist is a man who hasn't the courage of his convictions."

"Most women are sentimentalists, then," said Margery Herbert.

"Few women have the chance to act by their convictions," cried Mme. de Guerville.

"When one really feels," Victor broke in solemnly, "man or woman, one takes the chance."

"Ah, my brother"—Mme. Letuire smiled as she spoke—"you are in love again. Whenever you 'really feel,' I know you are in love."

The laugh was turned on Victor. He scowled at his sister.

"Victor is in that glorious decade of youth," said a sour-looking old man who had been taciturn, "when all the world is fresh and free. That is his illusion. For him all life is free. Free politics, free

thinking, free bread for those that can't buy it, work when you feel like it, play when you feel like it, pay when you can, live while you may—freely."

"Nothing costs so much as free love," said the Polish pianist, to whom all had listened the night before, and who was mute as a mountain peak to-day.

"You know," interposed Mme. Letuire, with her incessant smile, "a woman loves a man. A man loves himself. That's the difference between men and women in love."

"Some one has said," Lloyd Avery ventured, "that love is a matter of illusion. Maintain the illusion, and one is in love."

"But if one can no longer keep up the illusion?" Mrs. Herbert inquired.

"If one cannot secure it for oneself, at least one may provide it for others," Lloyd returned.

"That sounds like a mother-in-law," said Mme. Letuire.

The peal of laughter that followed Mme. Letuire's downright stroke was broken suddenly. The butler begged

Mme. de Guerville to go to the telephone. They all had a curious interest in a telephone-call that could get their hostess from the table.

In a few moments she returned and said:

"Stéphanie's husband has been hurt in the motor-race. She is in Paris."

"Is he dead?"

All the women thought the question, though none put it into words.

"He must be pretty badly injured for her to come all the way up here," Victor declared.

The sour old man spoke aloud for the second time:

"If he dies, what a simple dénouement!"

At the mention of death the wings of the butterflies round the table shivered. An ominous silence lay upon the company for a moment.

The sour old man broke the cloud, and with somewhat of a crash.

"At least three men in Paris," he said, "have looked forward to her widowhood."

His piercing glance was directed at Victor. Victor alone felt it. The others were watching the disagreeable sharp nose and pinched mouth of the sour old man, who was Paul de Guerville's legal adviser.

"Stéphanie said she does not know how serious his injuries are. They are bringing him to Paris on a special train."

"Coffee is served," the butler announced behind Mme. de Guerville.

Her guests rose relieved, and went into the next room.

In the new grouping Lloyd Avery and Mrs. Herbert were seated side by side on a divan. Before them two tiny transparent cups of Turkish coffee steamed on a tabouret. He smoked leisurely. She declined a cigarette.

"None of the women seem to be smoking," she said, "and while I never smoke in secret—that's honest—I don't care to shine alone."

"Isn't that the great wish of every woman?"

"To shine alone? Now, don't begin

again, please," she laughed in gentle raillery, "or you'll be repeating yourself."

"I'm afraid I may have done some embalming in there," he admitted ruefully, with a glance toward the dining-room, "but it's hard to do anything else if you're talking of one thing and thinking of another."

Her blue eyes lifted an instant before she said: "You didn't go last night?"

"I found at the last minute I could come to this luncheon." He smiled at her. "I go to-night. By the way, I'd like to call on your mother before I go. Does she see anybody? I couldn't remember, when I got back to the hotel last night, whether I had even asked about her. It was such a surprise to see you here."

"It was odd," Mrs. Herbert agreed.

"I felt afterward that I had been quite sheepish."

Her eyes flashed a smile upon him. "You're in much better form to-day."

"It's one of the hardest strains I know,

to meet people you haven't seen for a long time, in a place at all public."

"And yet you're not demonstrative by nature."

A faint smile showed at the corners of her mouth for an instant and disappeared.

"You've told me that before," he replied, picking up a fresh cigarette.

"Isn't it the privilege of friends to repeat themselves to each other?"

"May I still claim the privilege?" His half-closed eyes questioned her intently.

"It was one of the last things I said that winter day long ago."

"I'm glad you reminded me. I can tell you something now that I couldn't say on that occasion."

She laughed softly.

"I know. You're going to say good-by as you ought to have said it then. Just as you're saying to-day what you wished you could have said last night. Am I right?"

"Wait till I've told you," he answered, smiling.

In a side-glance Mrs. Herbert's alert

eyes saw Victor and his sister, Mme. Letuire, coming toward them from the other side of the room. She said quickly to him: "If you'll come to the hotel within half or three-quarters of an hour, you'll find mother very glad to see you. I'm going to the milliner's now, and then home."

They both rose. The coffee in tiny transparent cups was left cold and untasted.

She touched his arm lightly as he was about to bow himself in retreat before her.

He looked at her in surprise. Her blue eyes were misty.

"Don't come to the hotel—that is, don't come soon. Come after dinner, will you, Lloyd?" Her former charm irradiated again. "Come after dinner. Take me for a drive. I ask you as an old friend who is in need." Her low tones trembled.

"I'm leaving on the six o'clock train," he said.

"As a friend in need?" Her voice rose pathetically.

His eyes questioned her quietly, but with perception.

"You think I don't deserve it," she said.

Victor and his sister were quite near to them now.

"At eight?" Lloyd inquired hospitably.

"At eight, thank you so much," she answered, and hurried forward to meet the de Fesnières.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LURE OF THE FAR-AWAY

THERE was an unseasonable chill in the night air. The blue velvet of the May sky was blurred with shifting dun-gray masses that threatened renewed rain. The streets were still damp from the showers of the early evening. Cabmen, messengers and policemen wore their rain-capes. Here and there an obstinate puddle shone in the light of the lamp-clusters that thickly dot the Place de la Concorde. At the side which opens into the Avenue des Champs Elysées, Lloyd Avery and Mrs. Herbert got down from a fiacre. When the driver was paid and dismissed, they turned into the avenue, down whose long descent vehicles were crawling busily, big and black, with dazzling eyes that made

one think of enormous fabled insects. The long, tree-shrouded footpath was deserted.

It was not a night to invite the average pedestrian, who demands balmy weather in May. The two, in armor of rain-coats, walked leisurely, following the mysterious, shadowed vista, that seemed to end in nothing.

As they proceeded they sank deeper and deeper into personal reflection. The rumble of carriages and the panting of motors in the driveway dwindled miles away. The rare casual figures they passed were shadows. Outside each of them all that existed was the far-reaching path, bathed in a gray mist of veiled light—and ending in nothing.

Lloyd Avery had begun to think that he was being managed by women; and the thought enraged him as a wanton spur enrages a spirited horse. He knew that he was gentle with women, not because he feared them, but because he had been brought up with the notion that he must show their handicap of sex every consideration. He had always tried to act accord-

ing to this training. He wondered whether the man who did most for a woman was not he who domineered over her, tactfully, but with sure effect. For ten years he had been talked about as the most dependable man on a woman's visiting list. For luncheon, for tea, for dinner, with young people, with old people, he had been a most desirable guest. He was easy to get, he could dance, and he was famous for his ability to start a lively conversation. In the judgment of the more modern woman, he had only one deficiency. He hated cards, and could never be induced to play.

All this record as a social servitor, he reflected bitterly, only worked to his discomfort in his present plans. Pleasantly, but none the less actually, he had been bullied into postponement of his journey into Normandy, until he felt that Eleanor de Guerville must be convinced he would never go down there. She had asked him to dine with her to-night, to meet that tiresome, unknown Stéphanie, who had been called to Paris on account of the acci-

dent to her husband. Eleanor knew perfectly well that he wished to leave the city at six o'clock. He thanked Heaven that, on account of his promise to Margery Herbert, he would not have to meet Stéphanie. They all seemed so concerned in her affairs, which were hers alone, that he had grown to writhe at the sound of her name.

Yet he admitted to himself, with annoyance, that if he had not previously promised to take Margery Herbert for a drive, he would have weakly surrendered to Eleanor's dinner command.

Margery had spoken, with tears in her fine voice, if not in her brilliant eyes, of the need of a friend indeed. What could she need him for? Her mother, probably, had decided to go back to New York, or had taken on a new physician, which she was always doing. Need? None of these people knew what real need was, he meditated.

"And I ought to be digging trenches, to learn something about running myself."

The words were almost uttered. He

felt ashamed of the play-actor he was in life.

"Is your ego raging again?" Margery asked, smiling behind her veil.

His humor had blown out. "You said there was a real necessity that you should see me to-night," he returned.

She felt his mood. Her mouth straightened solemnly.

"I have received a proposal of marriage." Her words came in a dull monotone.

"Why don't you accept it?"

His reply came as a blow. She stopped walking. He stopped, and turned, facing her.

"Shall we go back?" she inquired coldly.

"No. Let's walk ahead and have it out."

He did not look at her as he spoke, and took a step forward.

She followed his example. They proceeded. In the silence they both breathed nervously.

"What's wrong?" she asked, after a

while. "Have I done anything to wound you?"

"No," he answered calmly.

"I have. I know I have." She was repentant in tone.

"That's so like a woman! You think I mean the exact opposite of what I say."

"I don't think; I know, Lloyd."

"Pardon me, you are mistaken. You have not hurt me. You've just amused me; and I've missed my train."

She bridled under his ironic lash, yet exclaimed in amazement:

"Amused you? What do you mean?"

"I'm going to repeat myself," he returned. "You remember that winter day, long ago?"

"Yes, Lloyd."

"I told you then your interest in me was mere curiosity, and that I was too old to be a profitable specimen."

She laughed. "I also can repeat myself: The emotional side of your being is dead, or never lived, rather. You even smoke cigarettes mechanically."

Some moments elapsed before either

spoke again. He broke the silence with words that seemed almost as if addressed to himself alone:

"How well we remember the bitter things we have said to each other, always so politely and with such an air of burlesque. We have misunderstood each other from the first. We never meet except to fall into argument, and yet we go right on meeting, as if we did nothing but agree. If we don't meet by design, we meet by accident, and straightway begins the old conflict of ideas. Funny, isn't it? It's almost like being married."

She laughed with a suspicion of forced heartiness.

"The saddest thing about you, Lloyd," she said, "is that you are never so somber as when you are gay and sprightly; and never so amusing as when you are serious. You must let me talk to you as a grown-up, since really, for all your thirty years, you seem younger than ever. You were much older two years ago. I suppose, at twenty you were very sedate and worldly-wise. Indeed, I know you were. And

now that I know what you are, I'm beginning to like you, where before——"

"Dear Margery," he said in a kindly voice, "I've always had one thing against you. You have such bad judgment—with the most generous heart in the world."

"Doesn't it indicate that I have some sense of perception, if I admit I was wrong in my first estimate of you?"

"Prove that you know now what I am.

"You're going down into a backwoods country to live all by yourself in a château —that's your own account of it."

"There's a family there to take care of the place," he interposed, "and later, when I get settled, I expect Randolph Cooper down to keep me from getting lonely. He made me promise I would keep a room for him. He said he couldn't afford to pay his board this summer." Lloyd smiled as he recalled Randolph's reason for accepting his invitation.

"From what I know of Randolph Cooper's luxury-loving soul," said Mrs. Herbert, "he is just the kind of man who would stay in such a place about

two days. You say you're going to paint. Yes, I think you'll paint about three days, and after that, you'll explore the surrounding villages. Then you'll meet the country people, notably a fat, red-cheeked girl, and, Great Scott I never thought of it, you may marry her!"

"Oh, stop, stop!" he protested; "you don't know what I really am at all. You will never believe that I'm sick of luncheons and dinners, dances, theaters, suppers, everything that makes up the old grind of life I've lived for ten years!"

"My dear Lloyd!" she admonished him in her most mature manner. "You are one of those pleasant but unfortunate men who are impossible to themselves, or to anybody that gets too near them. You talk like a man about to shuffle off this mortal coil."

"Not a bit of it," he retorted. "But I do maintain that ten years of such things as Eleanor's luncheon to-day is capital punishment to a man's soul."

"Why, Lloyd, she gets the most interesting people always; and to-day——"

"They are all interesting to themselves, and try to fake other people into believing as they do. They eat, not because they're hungry, but because they come there to eat. They talk, not because they think, but because they want to say something quotable. They have all the humanity of highly perfected marionettes; and the things they say are warmed-over cheap wit from third-class writers. They have no deeper grip on life than can be expressed by the taste for a new sauce, or an interest in a new play, which they make believe they can appreciate. I'm going down to live with peasants, who feel real earth in their hands, who haven't lost their hunger for bread and soup, and who are friends with the stars without knowing what the word 'astronomer' means."

His outburst sounded like a delirium to her.

She said awkwardly: "I think we'd better pick up a cab, and go back, don't you?"

"That's not what you think," he returned, laughing. "You think I'm going crazy. Maybe I am, but I like it."

A cab passed. He whistled to the driver, who drew up at the curb to let them get in.

Mrs. Herbert said nothing. Lloyd Avery, whom she had analyzed and labeled long ago, was suddenly dawning on her consciousness as a man she had never known. She had always counted on his pliableness. So much had she counted on it, that his present revelation of driving power was alarming. She wished she had never seen that cold, snowy afternoon in February, long ago, when she had felt so triumphant. Yet she thrilled with the vibration of his enthusiasm now. He was much more of a man than any one, except himself, suspected.

She wished she had never met the de Fesnières. The memory of Victor's hectic avowal was as annoying as a rainy wedding-day. Victor she might dispose of easily, were it not that her friendship with his mother held promise of so many welcome doorways for her in Continental society.

Though she was mute, Lloyd's tongue was loosed. He spoke to her so frankly in analysis of herself, that she shivered, yet with satisfaction. He told her he was sorry he had confided to her his plan of escape from the world of humdrum pleasure and threadbare illusion. To her, whose most real conceptions of life were colored with a stage-glow of unreality, such an idea of self-exile as he proposed would appear as merely fantastic. He had expected her prompt prediction of failure, and he knew she would deliver it in such a kindly, sympathetic way.

Thus, with the best intentions in the world, she had always disappointed him. He knew it would be impossible for him to make clear to her what he called "the lure of the far-away."

He was not sure that he comprehended it himself. He beheld in retrospect the occasion of his quixotic impulse.

Margery was now so pregnantly silent that he fancied he could hear her thoughts. She sighed. He had not forgotten her modes of expression. There were tears

in the brilliant blue eyes, he was sure. He went on rapidly, as a man does only when he is possessed body and soul of an idea. As he poured forth his confession, she was not so much conscious of his words as of the sound of his voice and the picture he made her see.

Her arm leaned against his ever so lightly. She wondered whether he knew.

It was a lazy, sunny afternoon, only a month before. He was sitting at a big window, in the country club, looking through a haze of cigar smoke at the shallow, winding river, whose ripples, in the burnishing of the sun, shone like a serpent's scales. Beyond the farther shore, the hills climbed in April's whimsical mixture of new and faded hues. Rampart on rampart piled in the distance, majestically tranquil against the blue and white brilliance of sky. On the summit of the remotest hill he could discern the red roof of a massive house.

The whole world seemed to lie between him and that tiled roof, symbol of the far-away. The lure was beckoning to him,

as often before when he had not heeded. In differing guise it beguiled the soldier of fortune, the sailor, the tramp, and wanderers of whatsoever name in all corners of the earth. It called to all men. Many yielded, many more resisted, though hearkening fearsomely in the penal round of daily duties. But he was still free. The lure grew fainter as the years hedged one in with circumstance and custom. His resolve had been instantaneous when he asked himself: After thirty does the call come ever?

She cut into his flow of words sharply, saying:

"You're not more than thirty-three, if you're a minute, and you talk like a boy of twenty."

He looked at her, and saw her lift her veil to press her handkerchief to her eyes. They were passing a line of shop-windows. In the light that came from them, he saw that the brilliant blue eyes were misty.

"You don't like talk from the shoulder. I ought to have known better," he said. "Please laugh at my dream and don't be-

lieve what I said about you. I mean it. But what do I know?"

"At the end of the third week of your exile," she returned, reaffirming her note of maturity, "unless you've met the red-cheeked girl, write me in care of Munroe. Mother's changed her mind about Marienbad. We may go to Aix. Tell me you have wakened from your nightmare. I shall consider all your talk to-night that of a man talking in his sleep. All—except that you were amused to hear a man should propose to me."

"Now, Margery, I didn't say that. I was amused that you should confide the secret to me after—well, that cold, snowy day, long ago."

"I said then, and you promised, we would be friends."

"I *am* your friend, Margery."

She laughed. "How do you talk to the people you don't like?" she asked.

"I don't talk to them."

"But I wanted help to-night. I'm upset and unhappy. You've talked about yourself and your fine ideas, and you've

told me, unconsciously perhaps, just what you think of me. No woman ever wants to know that from a man, and if you were not a boy——"

The cab stopped. They had reached the hotel.

He conducted her to the elevator, where they said good-by with a baffled air, as if their whole relationship were a kind of surprising comedy, destined to continue indefinitely, or most suddenly to become extinct.

"I say, Margery," Lloyd exclaimed softly, "here comes that de Fesnières fellow again. He seems to be on my trail. What is he, a detective?"

"He's probably bringing me some message from his mother." She tried to appear uninterested. "If I don't hear from you in three weeks, Lloyd, I shall know you've met the peasant swain. Good luck —good-night," her voice rose with the charming artificial inflection of hers, "and forgive me for making you miss your train."

"Oh, I can take a later one. Tell me,

and then I'll escape—is de Fesnières the man who——"

She laughed heartily. "Who's curious now? Go, catch your train, disillusioned one!"

## CHAPTER VI

### "LOVE IS WAR. ALL'S FAIR"

MRS. HERBERT'S smile, as Lloyd hurried away, gave no indication of her momentary desire to strangle him. She felt wounded in every nerve; and the deepest hurt was that she should not see him again. That he should have struck her so, and then run away, was an offense which shook even her exceptional poise.

She had been wooed many times, as she was beautiful and charming. She had capitulated once, evidently, as she was a widow; she savored the subtle exhilaration of the chase as delicately as does any woman. The wooing of Lloyd Avery, if he was wooing her, irritated, while it attracted her. The wooing of Victor de Fesnières, she recorded mentally, when she caught sight of him, became the more ir-

ritating and unattractive the more his determination showed itself.

Now he waylaid her at the elevator, and was so outspoken in his address that, to save her face before the servants, she invited him, with seeming welcome, to go into the drawing-room. It was just about ten o'clock.

The first thing she said to him was: "Please, Victor, don't talk with so much expression before servants."

"Servants?" he echoed. "They don't exist for me."

"But they do exist," she affirmed, "and they are mostly ears."

"You are still the same as you were this afternoon after luncheon," he moaned. "You are fending me off as though you wanted me to strike the faster. My heart is all in turmoil. Spare me."

There was not so much fault to be found with his approach, she thought, if one cared. For so young a man—she questioned now whether he was only twenty-five—he gave signs of positive genius in this branch of man's accomplishments.

Then his French was so musical. She would have been delighted to toy wantonly, yet charmingly, with his swift and ephemeral enthusiasm. She was sure it was only ephemeral. Her warning sign was his mother's wish and prayer that he should consummate the suitable marriage she proposed for him.

Margery Herbert's attachment to Mme. de Fesnières was genuine, as a mixture of self-interest and affectionate inclination. She could not easily bring herself to thwart any serious plan of the proud, aristocratic, rather helpless old lady. Besides, she told herself, she was not a flirt. She was only a woman whom men could not help making love to. Victor was, at least—well, he was younger than she. She told him so regretfully, and added that she was not the least bit in love with him.

She did not tell him that she had met a man to-day whom she had known long ago and thought she knew well; yet whom she had never really known.

Victor's reply to the chilling confession that she was not the least bit in love with

him, roused a long, fervid apostrophe, in which he spoke darkly of possible insanity or suicide.

Mrs. Herbert's handsome face, always seductive, became suddenly sober as a school-teacher's.

He uttered a torrent of boiling words. She interrupted him.

"Much as I dislike to do so," she cautioned her pursuer, with gentlest sternness, "I shall have to speak to your mother."

She knew that he had a sensitive affection for his mother. She knew, also, that, as her heir, he had a keen appreciation of her authority.

"I have told her already," Victor cried triumphantly. "Ah, my dearest Margery——"

The shadow of severe dignity fled in panic from Mrs. Herbert's expression. She gave a little gasp and whispered in monotone: "When did you tell her?"

"To-night, at dinner."

"Oh!" she sighed with relief, though she would have preferred to have told

Mme. de Fesnières the news herself. "Then I shall write to your mother."

Mrs. Herbert got up from her chair. "We leave early to-morrow. May I bid you good-night, Victor?"

"My dear Margery," he said, almost apologetically, "mother knew you were going to leave Paris early to-morrow."

"Of course. I told her."

"She will be very much obliged to you if you come with me to see her."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

"It's ten o'clock, Victor."

"I've got the motor outside. I've been waiting here since half-past eight."

Mrs. Herbert pondered. His mother had heard of his proposal at dinner. In view of the talk that day, in which she poured out her heart's secret about Victor, the news of his madness must have come to her with dire terror.

Her own mother, under the care of a maid and a nurse, always retired at nine. She was free on this score; and the upsets of the day had banished the prospect of

a sleepful night. Besides, she would have to face Mme. de Fesnières sooner or later in this tangle. She might better face her now, and settle matters. With Victor present, she was convinced she would exculpate herself to Mme. de Fesnières, if, from any look or hint of his mother's, exculpation should seem necessary. Finally, it would not take more than ten minutes for them to reach his mother's house.

"Very well, Victor, I'll go to your mother. We must hurry, though."

She led the way out of the room, left word at the office that she could be found by telephone at Mme. de Fesnières's, and then followed Victor to a motor coupé.

The coupé looked exactly like the one in which she had often ridden with Mme. de Fesnières. It was beginning to show signs of shabbiness, perhaps. The chauffeur—but before she could recognize him Victor had helped her gently to her seat, had sat beside her, and had slammed the door.

"You haven't told him where to go, have you?" she inquired.

"Oh, he knows quite well," Victor answered.

There was a suggestion of command in Victor's tone that nettled Margery.

"Thank you," she said coldly.

An uncomfortable silence, she felt, was growing up between them. She looked through the window on her side, and was surprised to note how fast the lights were whirring by. The chauffeur was taking the curves so sharply, too; and they seemed to be many more than usual. No doubt he was going by a shorter way.

The silence between her and Victor became more oppressive. She turned her gaze sidewise on him, and was startled.

His look was fixed straight ahead. His eyes had a cold, hard gleam. His lips were simply a straight line in the pallor of his face.

She wanted to speak to him; but, while he wore such a strained, troublous air, she was afraid.

Through the window she could see the lights whirring by, faster than before, it seemed. They were not so numerous now.

She tried to remember how long they had been in this rushing silence. Surely, they must be near his mother's house. She stared through the window in order to get an idea of where they were. All outside was unfamiliar. A shiver ran through her frame.

"Victor," she asked, and her voice came huskily, "are you sure the man knows where to go?"

"We'll be there in a moment," he replied, without looking at her.

"Your mother's house never seemed to——" She stopped. She noted a smile curling his lip.

He turned toward her and laid his hand on her arm. She drew away from him instinctively.

"You and mother both must leave matters to me henceforward," he said very calmly.

"What are you saying?" She laughed nervously.

Though he was smiling, there was a cruel glare in his eyes as he went on in

a low, deliberate tone, so unnatural to him:

"My mother has frightened you about me. She has absolutely prevented you from seeing me as I am, the one man in all the world who really loves you, and has loved you from the first—the only man who can make you happy. You know it yourself in your heart of hearts, but you are afraid to believe it. I know it, am sure of it, and of myself. It's the man's work to make it a fact, and I'm doing so."

"We'll discuss all that in the presence of your mother." Margery affected a calm she did not possess.

"We are not going to my mother's."

"What's that?" The words were hardly more than a gasp.

She struck her hand out to seize the tube, by which to address the chauffeur.

Victor caught her wrist firmly, but gently, and held it.

"We are going to England, Margery, to be married, and run our affairs our own way without interference from my mother, your mother, anybody's mother."

"Oh, Victor," she groaned, "how could you stoop to such a trick?"

"Love is war. All's fair."

"You hurt my hand. Please let go."

He released her wrist. The coupé came to a sudden stop. He reached out his hand to open the door.

He spoke again, coldly, deliberately:

"We're at the station. Come with me now, Margery, and let us forget all the people who have stood between us. I shall always show you the respect and courtesy you have known from me. This one act of—well—of—well—discourtesy——"

"Do you think I shall——" Margery ceased.

The chauffeur had got down. The door was opened bruskly.

Victor stepped out and gave his hand to her. She ignored his hand and his face as she got out; but looked up at the great Gare St. Lazare and about, like a bird suddenly free from its cage. She was so bewildered for a moment that she forgot the shock of her humiliation.

As happens in moments of crisis, her

attention was diverted by the most ordinary details. She became aware of people hurrying into the station, of people hurrying out of it.

A cab drew up just ahead of the coupé from which she had alighted. Porters ran for the luggage piled beside the driver.

Victor was saying something to her, she did not know what. His hand was on her arm. She did not draw away from him. She was in a daze.

A man got out of the newly arrived cab, on which her eyes were fixed in a stare.

She stared at the man, also, as he paid the driver. Then, tearing her arm from Victor's grasp, she almost flew to the man's side, crying in English:

"Lloyd! Lloyd! You must help me!"

Victor followed in swift pursuit.

## CHAPTER VII

### A HERO DESPITE HIMSELF

THE porters stepped back, but craned their heads forward at the break of excitement in the routine of their office. The cabman waited, looking on curiously. Cabmen always wait.

"Lloyd, Lloyd!" Margery babbled hysterically, "I'm in a terrible plight. Take me back to the hotel, please do."

"I will ask you, sir," Victor interposed, in his most formal English, "not to interfere in affairs with which you have no concern."

"If you will both cool off, I may find out just what it's all about. I have five minutes to catch my train. Go ahead."

"Take me. to the hotel," Margery pleaded between sobs.

"She is going to England with me, sir," Victor said solemnly.

"To-night?" Lloyd exclaimed.

"We are to be married," Victor rejoined.

"We are not," cried Margery. "I shall never speak to him again."

"I advise you, sir, not to interfere." Victor delivered the admonishment superbly.

"Mr. de Fesnières," said Lloyd, rather pale suddenly, but quite unruffled, "Mrs. Herbert is an old friend of mine. I can believe that you love her and want to marry her. I can't see, however, why, when you love her, you should wish to submit her to indignity."

"I have asked you, sir, not to interfere." Victor's eyes glared.

"As I've said, Mrs. Herbert is an old friend of mine. She asks me to take her to her hotel."

"I, sir, ask——"

"What you ask, suggest, or indicate, I'll remember. Jump in, Margery."

He held the cab door open for her.

He called up to the driver the name of her hotel; he summoned one of the porters, murmured directions about his bags, and gave the man a tip.

"Good-night, Mr. de Fesnières," he said pleasantly to Victor.

Victor muttered an imprecation and turned his back on him. The door was shut and the cab moved away at a smart trot.

As soon as Margery felt that she was surely on the road of rescue, she burst into a fit of sobbing.

Lloyd made no attempt to stop her access of emotion. He knew it was imprudent to interrupt a woman at such a moment, and he did not know just how much of an ordeal she had been through.

Besides, he was principally occupied with the ironic reflection that now, for the fourth time, he had missed the train that should have taken him to his Norman retreat. He began to doubt his ability to do what he wished to do in any matter. Circumstances, trivial in themselves, yet overpowering in the mass, were

sapping his will power, were determining the course of his life against himself. Some day he would ride as he rode now, unwillingly, off to church to be married; and then ride away from church with a woman he never had had the least intention of marrying.

Was this ride an omen? Would the woman be Margery Herbert? He realized now that she might seem like a woman he never had had the least intention of marrying.

Yes, he had delivered her out of the hands of her persecutor. So she would think. He had saved her at the height of peril. Her romantic habit would make her see it so. He was a hero. So she would name him. And all there is left for a hero to do is to marry the woman.

Would Margery think so, with her heroistic notion of men and women? And Victor? Would Victor make up his mind that Lloyd Avery meant to marry Mrs. Herbert? Would he say so among his people and his friends?

A stifled sigh escaped his lips. He de-

voutly wished he had waited for the midnight train, instead of having rushed for the ten-thirty.

"Did you say anything?" Margery asked.

"Not a word." His tone was self-possessed, alert, kind. He felt the danger of the moment.

"Oh, Lloyd," she said, "you're such a dear!" She laid her gloved hand ever so lightly on his wrist.

He made a gesture with that hand to free it. "Don't mention it, Margery."

She began to cry silently, saying:

"And I'm such a fool."

"No, no, Margery."

"Yes, I am; you've often said so. Even to-night when we were walking."

"Why, Margery," he stammered now, "I—er—don't recall——"

"Not in so many words, of course. But never mind; I forgive you everything because you're such a hero."

"I knew you'd say that." He laughed.

She was hurt. "Lloyd, tell me, you

aren't conceited like all the others, are you?"

"I hope not; but I don't like to be called names."

"Names?" Her tone showed her amazement.

"I can't quite tell you, Margery, what I mean. I know, though, that I'm glad to have met you to-night again—er—because you seemed—er—so glad to see me; and——"

"Please let me explain, Lloyd. I told you this evening that I had received a proposal. Now, you may guess from whom. I could hardly refrain from smiling at his—well—at him. His mother is an intimate friend of mine, and has confided her hopes about his future. She wants him to marry Stéphanie——"

"The woman whose husband was hurt in the motor-race?"

"That's the one."

"They all seem to be wishing that fellow godspeed, don't they?"

"Victor came to-night to say that he

had told his mother of his proposal, and that she was waiting to see me."

"And you got into the cab?"

"Just think of the position I'm in toward his mother."

"I think if there are any heroes still in Paris, Victor is one of them. He's a regular musketeer."

"Don't laugh, Lloyd. He's a little cad."

"Easy, easy, Margery. You may fall in love with him yet. These dashing fellows, you know——"

"It's awfully nice of you, Lloyd, to make me see the whole matter as a joke," she laughed faintly.

To this he did not know what to say. He took the whole affair so seriously.

The cab drew up in front of her hotel. The door was opened for them.

"Good-night. A million thanks," she whispered enchantingly, "and be sure to write."

He walked beside her to the elevator, told her he would go right back to the station to take the midnight train, and

promised again to write to her about his château after two weeks, if he had not fallen victim to the charms of a red-cheeked peasant-girl.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHÂTEAU D'EXIL

Two weeks and three days later Mrs. Herbert received a bulky letter, which, by the handwriting of the address, she knew to be from Lloyd Avery.

Across the top of the first sheet he had written: "Don't try to read this letter unless you have nothing else to do.

"The two weeks are passed. I am still here. I have painted very little, but have dreamed and pondered a good deal. And I have not met the girl.

"The real name of this house is Château de Dorp. I call it Château d'Exil. Imagine a low, oblong country house, built of stone, in an enclosure of five or six acres, that is marked off by a stone wall at least eight feet in height. Stud trees and shrubbery, thickly as you can, all over

the six acres, except in those plots occupied by the house and adjoining buildings. Let the buildings be two or three hundred years old; and for ten years past have vegetation in the park grow wild.

"The house, though, is kept in perfect order by one of the homeliest and most likable of women, Mère Lafosse, mother of four stalwart soldiers of the republic, and director of her spouse, Paul Lafosse, the hugest man I've ever seen outside a circus. Lafosse is the meekest of men, too; not because he is timid apparently, but because he is very busy with life—which is his farm. Everybody calls him by his nickname, 'Bisco.' He even gets letters addressed 'Monsieur Bisco.'

"In this country your nickname is your trade-mark. They call me *'l'Américain';* and I believe I am the first of the race to settle in this particular place, although many of them visit Falaise, William the Conqueror's town, which is six or seven miles away. You may be sure I keep tourists at that safe distance, though Falaise is worth seeing more than once.

"Letters are sent 'Vassilly, *par* Falaise,' as that's the post-office town. Vassilly is my village, about a quarter of a mile from the château. The village is a clump of low-browed stone cottages that contain in all about two hundred people. The mayor and the curé are the notables. I have been honored by a call of ceremony from each.

"All the men here wear blue blouses and sabots on week days. Their Sunday best is a fine black blouse and a wide-brimmed, black felt hat. The women and girls wear sabots, or big clumsy shoes, that don't look nearly so graceful as sabots. No hats. Instead, white bonnets that shine in the sun, they're so beautifully laundered.

"I've worked very hard to be able to give you these notes on 'Latest Fashions from Vassilly,' knowing your interest in such matters, and I hope you'll appreciate my efforts.

"No matter how I try, I can't seem to find use for more than three rooms in this big house—the library, a small room next to it that serves as dining-room, and a

vast bedroom that looks to the east. The massive four-poster is laboriously carved with cupids, in sundry anatomical postures, strewing flowers. It was almost smothered with a canopy, richly woven with more cupids, rather German-looking, who hover above a shepherd and shepherdess in a pastoral scene. The latter are standing under a tree, and the rain is coming down swiftly in long, silk threads of silver. The shepherd is wooing her with the old song:

*" 'Il pleut, il pleut, bergère,*
*Presse tes blancs moutons;*
*Allons sous ma chaumière,*
*Bergère, vite allons!'*

"I've got the canopy hung against the wall now.

"The shelves in the library are packed with faded leather volumes of all sizes and titles, including anything from 'Boccaccio' to the 'Lives of the Saints,' formidable in six huge volumes. Each afternoon I find a copy of *Le Temps* on

the table. It comes by mail, and the wrapper bears the name of the titled owner of the place. I have read the dull sheet more than once, from first line to last.

"One room I call the Obituary Chamber. The walls are covered with family portraits, all about the same in size and manner of painting. Besides, the faces look so much one like the other that at a glance you might think all the pictures were copies.

"That's the only count I have against the proprietor of Dorp, who lived here himself until a few months ago, and who has rented me a couple of good saddle-horses. None but bachelors have occupied the château in twenty years. There's a story about one of the family, whose young wife died here of a mysterious illness during the *lune de miel.* Since then the room she died in has never been opened and—you can imagine the rest.

"Ghosts? Haunted? Not to my knowledge. I am amazed to find myself rising regularly between half-past five and six

in the morning; and I've seen sunrise twice. Mère Lafosse says I am très-matinale. What's still more curious, I can't keep awake after ten at night, no matter how much I smoke, or what I read. The country for miles around is silent as a waste of ocean. . . . And I take soup every morning!

"'Soup before breakfast?' I hear you ask in horror. 'That is, soup with breakfast? A breakfast of soup?'

"Quite so; and the novelty is full of emotional possibilities even for me, whose emotional faculties, you say, are dead. It's always onion soup, too, which, Mère Lafosse assures me solemnly each morning, prevents colds and sore throat, improves the voice, and is richening for the blood. You see, the patent-medicine germ will find one out, even in this far-off pocket of the globe.

"Continuing the subject of my cuisine, Mère Lafosse has secret ways of preparing eggs, so that I am never sure whether I am eating grass with clotted cream, or a strange delicious fish. I am

happy to say that in three weeks I have not only not seen, but not even heard mention of eggs boiled, poached, fried, frazzled, scrambled, or in the morocco binding of an omelet. Can you say as much?

"'What an existence!' you cry, and your exquisite nostrils shrivel in a sniff. 'I should go mad in three days.' Believe me, you would not. Do you remember you once thought you'd spend a summer on a sheep-ranch in Montana with some people you knew there? You were to lead the strenuous life—ponies, guns, pistols, breeches, tents, coffee, and hardtack. This is effete civilization compared to the Wild West.

"I am willing to admit that I do not have as many opportunities to talk here as I have long been accustomed to, and perhaps that's one of the reasons why you are afflicted with this unconscionably long letter. Your old reproach, that I was incapable of writing anything longer than a telegram, I herewith deny, disprove, and extinguish. Sometimes I have

mute communings with a solitary tree that stands on a ridge about half a mile from my window. I've wondered what the tree thinks about the whole game; and if a tree, when alone, thinks as much about itself as a man does? And with corresponding distaste for the subject? Etc., etc. Usually Mère Lafosse, gnarled in body and sturdy as an oak, interrupts my vagaries by announcing something to eat. In a flush of appreciation yesterday, I said I intended to pay her a little more than I had agreed, because of the exceptional quality of her service. She remonstrated at once.

"I explained that I was paying her for her originality.

" 'My originality!' she exclaimed. 'Monsieur flatters Mère Lafosse. The hens lay the eggs; le bon Dieu makes the hens. The cows give the milk; the onions grow; the coffee—ah, that, for example, the grocer brings. Where he gets it, I do not know.'

" 'Do not reveal your secrets,' I warned her; 'I might make use of them myself.'

" 'Monsieur in the kitchen! The droll idea!' Her little black eyes twinkled in merriment.

"I told her my head was full of droll ideas, most of which were more impossible than the chance of my turning cook. When I asked her whether she ever thought about herself, she gazed at me wondering, and said she did not understand.

" 'You must study your soul,' I suggested, 'when you go to confession.'

" 'That,' she told me with deliberation —'that I cannot tell you so surely. In general, when I go to confession the soup is on the fire, and it's nearly always a Saturday, the busiest day of the week. Besides, what have I to confess? I am much too occupied to permit myself the luxury of sin. That's for people who have nothing to do.'

"She shook her round, close-brushed head, and laughed sagely.

"As she was going out I rather envied her.

"When I talk with the men, who are

so hard at work that I see them infrequently, they completely exhaust my powers of imagination in two or three minutes by pumping me for facts about crops and sky-scrapers in America. I never should have thought I could talk so instructively on these topics, and at the same time know so little about them. Do you know how many doors and windows there are in the highest building in America? If you don't, there's no use in expecting to be asked to Vassilly. . . .

"Aix-les-Bains is far from here—farther even than New York. Yet I send you my most earnest good will, and, above all, my gratitude, if you have had the patience to hear me through. Be sure of this—if the letter has been a labor for you to read, it has been a great pleasure for me to write. Thus, compensation.

"No word yet from Randolph Cooper —after he begged me to take him in, too. I wrote and told him I supposed he had got even a better offer of free lodging than mine—perhaps a fresh-air fund, or something.

"My greetings to your mother. I shall be very glad to hear from you when you find time to forward me some 'sage, motherly advice.' "

For all the comprehensiveness of the letter to Mrs. Herbert, one impression, in his own mind Lloyd called it an experience, was omitted; but only because it did not begin to occur until the moment he was dropping the bulky envelope in the post-office at Falaise.

A young woman was talking to a clerk at one of the grilled windows in the partition. Lloyd did not note a word of the conversation. He was too intent on spending profitably the few instants of apparently casual observation that courtesy condoned.

She was not wearing sabots, nor yet the clumsy boots he saw in the town. Her shoulders were not marred by the countrywoman's stoop of toil; nor was her figure the lumpy enigma of the bourgeoise of the region. Most marvelous of all, her hands were small, and gloved in gloves that fitted. It was years since he had seen

such hands! He caught a good view of them as she took the printed blank the clerk slid out under the grating, with a deferential, *"si madame aura l'obligeance——"*

Her dress and hat were dark, and seemed to him very plain. Only the little band of white that lined the collar softened the severity of her attire. Her face, ruddy with the tan of constant outdoors, showed in profile, delicate as carved ivory. He wondered what might be the color of her eyes.

Curling wisps of her dark, lustrous hair strayed at the nape of her neck. He noticed them as he passed behind her, on his way out of the grimy, ill-ventilated room. Drawing the door shut after him, he looked at her for the last time, standing there lithe and graceful, every muscle in harmonious accord.

In front of the post-office waited a sturdy black cob, harnessed to a high-wheeled cart. He had been hardly conscious of horse, cart, or driver on his way

in; now he gave all three an attentive look. The man in the cart wore no livery but his black Sunday blouse and big felt hat.

Lloyd made his way briskly along the uneven pavement to the main street, where he had left his mount in the stable-yard of the Hotel de Normandie.

Probably she was the wife of a doctor or a lawyer in the town; or, it might be, she was of the family of bankers who transacted their dignified affairs in one half of their residence. He could guess what her point of view and her range would be as a member of provincial society.

It was not she herself that piqued his reflectiveness; it was what she suggested, what she represented in indistinct expression. And he had come upon her so suddenly and unexpectedly. In two weeks—what a long time it was—she was the only human being he had seen with whom he might claim kinship of civilization. She might even have come from that distant

world he had left. Unquestionably, however, she had not.

As he walked his horse down the steep, quaint streets, past shops and houses, whose every stone, window, and sign-lettering was tinged with the mellowed hues of age and history, he wondered at the exhilaration of unrest the glimpse of the woman had stirred within him. Was that other world already calling him back?

At the end of the street he turned to the right and climbed the long slope that leads away from the city. Reaching the summit, he held his horse and looked back at the varicolored roofs of tiles piled up the hillside; at the sand-gray gigantic walls and tower of the fortress in the distance; at that spot, midway in the old town, where he knew the post-office stood. Above it all shone a sun of gold.

The shrill screech of a train approaching Falaise station sounded from the hilltop at the other side of the valley. The horse pricked up its ears nervously and shivered.

Lloyd dug the spurs lightly, and rider

and steed fled from the town, under ancient trees, along the hard white road that pointed with arrow-like directness to Vassilly and the Château d'Exil.

## CHAPTER IX

### MADAME LA SAINTE

With the first days of July came torrential rain, that converted the roads about Vassilly into streams, and draped the countryside in bleak, inhospitable tones. There was still no word from Randolph Cooper; and, to deepen the depression of the occupant of the château, Mère Lafosse was seized with an attack of rheumatism. After hobbling amid groans and grunts for nearly a week, she wofully surrendered to her bed, though still obstinate against her fond Bisco's desire that she summon the doctor from Falaise.

Meanwhile, Zoë, her handmaiden, served *l'Américain* as cook and housekeeper. Zoë was tall and flat of figure, with hair and eyes black as tar. Her cheeks and big hands seemed to burn with

blushes at each slightest request of her temporary master. And, no matter what he said, the extent of Zoë's conversation was an awe-stricken whisper, almost a whistle, of yes or no. When she clattered nervously out of the room, looking for all the world like a highly mechanized automaton, *l'Américain* thought longingly of refined vaudeville at home.

During the deluge he spent many hours in the library, where he favored before all other books the "Lives of the Saints." These heavy, yellow-stained volumes promised novelty, and charmed him by fulfilment. As short stories, they were different from any he had ever read, and they all had a happy ending.

In simple mercy the heavens at last ceased to drench the sodden fields, and the thatched roofs that frowned above the desponding heads of the farmers. The sun blazed wrathfully over his usurped domain; and friendly winds put the rain-clouds to rout.

That the welcome heat and dryness had penetrated to the rheumatic bones of Mère

Lafosse, Lloyd learned from Zoë, in the course of a chat much like a dental operation. Mère Lafosse would be able to sit in a chair the next morning, Sunday; and hoped that *Monsieur l'Américain* would pass by the cottage, when he was en promenade.

He found Mère Lafosse, nestled in pillows, in a stiff chair beside her doorway. A pear tree, trained against the house, rose behind her with quaint effect. From her scoured sabots, resplendent in the sunlight, to the bonnet on her round head, she was fresh and clean as new-baked bread. Her cheeks were drawn, yet her eyes had lost little of their quickness and shine. Spouse Bisco and her four soldiers of the republic stood round, elate of heart, but ill at ease in Sunday attire. They were talking of the hay, which would have to be mowed and gathered promptly, lest more rain should fall. Soon the church bell's notes came modestly musical over the fields; and Mère Lafosse, enjoining Fernand, the youngest, not to forget to light a taper for her at the shrine of the

Holy Virgin, bade them all, in her sharp, brisk voice, to make haste. The men bowed awkwardly to *l'Américain,* and trudged away reluctant, murmuring, *"à tantôt, à tantôt!"*

"It is long," said Mère Lafosse smiling, "since I have arranged for monsieur the eggs *à la Normande."*

"Too long," he replied. "I've begun to lose my appetite. And when Zoë said you refused to have a doctor, I was afraid —well—one can never tell, you know."

"Monsieur, what good to make that dear old imbecile of a doctor come all the way from Falaise—and in such weather? Besides, he has the asthma. Now, I ask monsieur, can a doctor who permits himself to have the asthma do anything for rheumatism? No, monsieur. For Mère Lafosse, better than any doctor is that good heart, who knows something of medicines also, Mme. La Sainte, of Bretêche. Monsieur has seen her, no doubt."

"I'm sorry to say I haven't had the pleasure of meeting her."

"Is that true? But it is just like her. All the kindness she does for people she does in secret, coming and going as if she were afraid of being seen. She comes from far, too. Bretêche is more than a jump from here. To be sure, she rides in her cart—still, she is an angel. And she makes such cheeses, monsieur! Monsieur knows, perhaps, of her factory over there? It is a pleasant ride in good weather. Why, monsieur, she even sends cheeses to America! It may be that monsieur has eaten of the Bretêche cheese."

"Perhaps I have, Mère Lafosse," he admitted, with faint interest. He was beginning to look for a sentence with which he could take leave of her gracefully.

"It is inevitable that monsieur has eaten of them in America," Mère Lafosse went on volubly. "After all, they are the best Normandy cheeses. Mme. La Sainte will be delighted to know that you have eaten of them." She turned creakily in her chair and cried toward the doorway: "Are you up there, Mme. La Sainte?"

A chill of dismay struck Lloyd. He

did not feel in the least like meeting the cheesemaker now. It was one of those mornings, he thought, when he was impatient of conversation, of seeing people, even.

"To be sure, Mère Lafosse. You are not cold, I hope."

The voice from within was melodious. He had scarcely expected that. The accent was the accent of the country, doubtless, but softened; and the words were not huddled together, as were those of Mère Lafosse.

"Well, then, will you please come down?" asked Mère Lafosse.

"In a moment."

The tone was melodious as at first, and Lloyd dreaded the sight of the cheesemaker the more. He could see her, fat and ruddy, with perhaps a missing tooth. He was reminded of other occasions, when he had heard rare voices before laying eyes on their possessors. Long ago, one night at the opera, the voice of a woman sitting directly behind him—but steps were pattering lightly on the stairs. He listened.

That was not the tread of sabots, surely; not the tread of heavy shoes.

The next instant, the weather-worn stone doorway, from the lintel of which a branch of the pear tree sprayed green and white, was transformed into the frame of a picture.

Swiftly the American's eyes comprehended the trim figure of the cheesemaker; the little shoes peeping beneath a short skirt; the dark, plain dress, with tiny white ruff at the collar; the small hands, gloved in gloves that fitted; and the delicate tanned features, that weeks before he had seen only in profile, in the post-office at Falaise.

Instead of a hat she wore one of the linen bonnets, tied so deftly under her pretty chin, and binding so lightly her wealth of black hair, that it brought to his mind, quite irrelevantly, a suggestion of masquerade. He wondered still what might be the color of her eyes. Though he saw them now, he was conscious only of their expression; of a light in them sub-

dued, yet serene; of a look of purpose, determined yet gentle.

Mère Lafosse was saying: "Mme. La Sainte, this is *Monsieur l'Américain.*"

*"Bon jour, monsieur,"* and her long-lashed eyelids closed as she bowed, acknowledging the crude introduction with composure.

Lloyd said that he was very glad to know her. He wished he might say, that he had often thought of her, since that day at Falaise. Not of her personally, after all, but of her as reminding him of the far-away world of other days.

She was not, then, the wife of a doctor, or of a lawyer, in the town, but of a cheesemaker in the lonely region of Bretêche. She was herself a cheesemaker. He had a keen desire to talk with her. How little she dreamed of the memories and impressions he owed to her! This he was sure he could never tell her even if he were to stay at Vassilly for years, instead of a summer. No matter what she said, to look at her and to hear her voice, would be delight for

one whose women acquaintances thus far had been limited to Mère Lafosse and Zoë.

It would be absurd to begin conversation, he thought, by supposing that he had eaten Bretêche cheese in America. Though he had no recollection of it, he might suppose he had eaten it, because he knew cheese only by the generic name. Absurd as such an opening would be, cheesemaking was probably the most fruitful of topics for her.

"If you're going to mass, madame," said Mère Lafosse, still talking, "the men are already gone. You will have to make haste."

"I'm going now," the cheesemaker replied, holding up her prayer-book and her rosary of pearl beads.

"One chaplet for poor Lafosse, please," the old woman begged, and, smiling enigmatically at Lloyd, added: "Perhaps *Monsieur l'Américain* would like to go to church. Who knows? One might make a good Norman Catholic of oneself."

"I should like very much to see the church," he said, "if Mme. La Sainte will permit me to follow her. One who doesn't belong feels so at sea when there's service going on." He bowed solicitously to the cheesemaker.

"It will be a pleasure to have you come with us, monsieur," she returned sincerely, he judged, but without enthusiasm at the oddity of the idea. "Zoë will be down directly."

"Zoë, make haste!" Mère Lafosse shrilled.

"At once, at once!" was Zoë's hoarse answer.

Lloyd was rather regretful now that he had agreed to go. He had been prefiguring the walk with the dainty cheesemaker. Zoë would not only be superfluous, but her automatic gait fretted his nerves.

Had Mère Lafosse divined his disappointment; or, was it only her woman's instinct, that prompted her to bid the cheesemaker and the American make haste on their way?

"Bring the mirror with you, Zoë!" she called ironically in the doorway. "The others are going. You'll have to do the rest of your fixing on the way. The coquette," she continued, lowering her voice to Lloyd, "she knows very well who is here, and, besides, she may meet *some one* at church. Ah, well, one is not young a second time. *Au revoi', m'sieu' et 'dame.* I beg of you to make haste."

They went from the garden, and down the road at a quick pace. When they were well out of hearing distance, Mme. La Sainte said she hoped he did not resent the brisk injunctions of Mère Lafosse to hurry.

"Not at all," he assured her. "Since Mère Lafosse coerced me into eating onion soup every morning for breakfast, or before breakfast, I don't know which, I feel that she has undertaken much of my personal responsibility."

"You know," Mme. La Sainte said, a few moments later, "the people here have a joke about Mère Lafosse. But perhaps I would better not tell you. It is rather

irreverent. As you don't 'belong,' to use your own word, I might scandalize you."

"Oh, you *must* tell me now," he protested. "When you get to church you can make some kind of a prayer by way of amends."

"You mean an act of contrition?"

"Yes, if that's the name."

"But it would have no value," she expounded, nodding her head slowly.

"What if I tempt you to tell me?" he persisted, noting her profile under the bonnet. It was still rarer and more winning than when he first saw it. She was wearing a hat then.

"I must resist," she answered with a quick smile.

What a piquant little catechism she was in human form. After all, she was not quite so short as she had seemed. He was not more than half a head taller.

"Let us suppose, then," he said after reflection, "that from the hint you have given I should think there was some dreadful secret in the life of Mère Lafosse."

"You know you don't think that. What an idea!" She laughed.

It was the first time he had heard her laugh. With such a voice he might have guessed her laugh would be notable.

"I *might* think it, though. And I don't believe I am as good at resisting temptation as you are."

"I'll tell you, then. They say about Mère Lafosse, who manages and hurries everybody, even the good curé, when he can't escape her, that when she arrives at the gate of heaven, and she hears St. Peter fumbling with the golden key in the lock, she will cry out: 'Make haste, make haste, St. Peter, there's quite a line of us here!' It is irreverent, isn't it?" She looked at him questioningly.

"That's not so bad. They ought to absolve one without confession for it," he told her.

"Not suited to the occasion, though," she rejoined. "But I think I've heard Mère Lafosse say 'make haste' at least fifty times since I got there this morning."

A martial tread sounded behind them. They turned, and stood looking along the white road that arched like a bow between golden fields.

"There's Zoë," said Mme. La Sainte. "We'll wait for her."

"I should know Zoë's military figure and flaming cheeks," he said, "if I did not meet her again in a thousand years. She's almost a giantess, poor girl!" He paused. "I don't know whether you have ever remarked, madame, that of tall women, not one in ten is a success." He smiled.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Poor Zoë has already suffered," said Mme. La Sainte, suddenly serious.

"Love?" he inquired, trying to seem credulous.

Then she told him of Zoë, the ungainly, in whose heart love hungered. How she had managed, by years of scrimping, to accumulate a little dowry of money and household linen. No one could say how much money Zoë had, but the young fellows, who knew her ways, guessed it must be a decent sum. Achille Duclos showed

marked attention to her for a time, and then suddenly ceased to be interested. Achille Duclos had not fixity in anything, the cheesemaker commented. Zoë's attachment to him became the more noticeable, as the effect of Duclos's remissness. Then he went away suddenly to work in a village half a day's ride from Vassilly. Before going he told one of his companions that the only money dowry Zoë had was about two hundred francs. He did not know anything about the linen.

Zoë suffered the tortures of disappointment and humiliation, during the dark winter months, in sullen silence and aloofness. For weeks she dared not go to church and submit herself to the stares of the parish.

The warmth of the spring sun glowed in her heart on an evening in the May just past, when, after benediction, Jules Lignat, the blacksmith, approached Zoë cautiously, and muttered that he would like to walk back with her to Dorp. Jules scarcely reached to her shoulder, but he was not the least man in Vassilly. It

was for Jules that she was wearing the red bow, spread in great wings across her breast, which, in the glare of the sun this morning, intensified the redness of her cheeks and mighty hands.

When she came up to them, Zoë bowed stiffly and whispered, *"Bon jour."* Her Sunday dress added to her natural cumbrous poise; the habit she had of walking from her ankles made keeping step impossible. For all that, her face was not ugly, Lloyd thought. At least it should not be wholly without attraction to the young fellows of her sphere.

The first time he saw her he had been tempted to smile; later, her grotesque movements irritated him. Since Mme. La Sainte had spoken of her so simply, so humanly, he felt touched, mystified.

Zoë, after all, was one with the most desired and most noble of women. The love-hunger to cherish, to serve, to cling, was in her heart.

He could not recall when, if ever before, the love idea had revealed itself to him so plainly. Back there in the world

he had left, women were different, it seemed; and they were the only ones he could ever know.

In the church he was beside Mme. La Sainte, kneeling when she knelt, rising, and kneeling again, as she rose and knelt. The stillness and absorption of the people that crowded the decaying old building, through whose colored windows the sunlight slanted on white bonnets, white heads and heads of curious bumps and shapes; the wheezing organ, trying to make itself heard above the nasal Latin of the choir; the gray old tonsured priest, in strange habiliments, moving from side to side mysteriously, amid the dim glow of the candles; all the strange sights and sounds struck him with a new sense of exile.

After mass the women spent a while in the churchyard, inspecting gravestones and pottering with flowers on the mounds, that were ill-shapen after the long rain. The men, with cigarettes and pipes,

talked of the necessity of getting the hay in before another spell of wet weather.

The two-wheeled cart that Lloyd had first seen outside the post-office at Falaise, with the same black horse, was driven up smartly to the church, to take Mme. La Sainte back to Bretêche. Lloyd held out his hand to assist her as she put her foot on the step. Michel Porcher, the mayor, a very Falstaff in bulk, came up, doffing his black hat and twinkling his roguish blue eyes. He asked Mme. La Sainte about the cheese market, and inquired after the health of *Monsieur l'Américain.*

Lloyd marked a distinct deference in the attitude of the supreme official toward the cheesemaker.

"Madame," said Lloyd, raising his hat and looking up at her, "I shall always remember that you showed me the way to church."

"You were very patient for a beginner," she answered. "Do you think you will ever go again?"

"Very likely. There are not many places to go here, you know."

"One doesn't need a guide-book to get round in Vassilly."

"I hope I do not look like a tourist, madame."

"Oh, no. Still, you ought not to go from here without seeing the cheese-factory at Bretêche. Even the natives visit it."

"I should be glad to go over, if I were sure visitors don't interrupt the workmen."

"You will be quite welcome, monsieur, on the day you may choose."

"Thank you, madame. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir, monsieur.*"

Her driver, the same he had seen that day at Falaise, waved his whip, and the sturdy black cob stepped briskly away.

Nodding to the villagers he passed, Lloyd strolled back toward Dorp. He caught a glimpse of Zoë, holding hands with Jules Lignat, turning into a side road to go the long way round.

There had been an unexpected ease

and grace in Mme. La Sainte's manner, as she talked with him from the high cart, that surprised the American. If this was the polish of a provincial, he could not see that it differed widely from the polish of a Parisian. Originally, he fancied, she had married a cheesemaker—and married out of her class. Now she was simply bearing the responsibility that Fate had shifted to her shoulders.

She stood out alone in Vassilly, as he himself stood alone. Hard as it was to reason belief from outward evidence, he felt that they were kin. He liked everything about her; yet he knew nothing of her. In a moment of illumination, he told himself that it was the class she suggested, not her personality, which had made so deep an impression from his first glimpse of her.

When he reached the château he met Mère Lafosse, who came limping from a path that led into the park. He paused for a few words with her about the church, and, as he was going, said casually:

"I suppose M. La Sainte doesn't go to church?"

The old woman's face became a mask.

"He is not here?" she asked with an air of suppressed alarm.

"Doesn't he manage the cheese factory?" asked Lloyd, his curiosity rising, as he read her expression.

"No, monsieur," she answered, "and they are excellent cheeses, monsieur. I shall get one for you to-morrow." Her habitual smile returned.

It was clear that Mère Lafosse, for once since he had known her, did not wish to talk. He had never so much wanted her to talk. He could wait, however.

Meanwhile, there was a new interest for him in Vassilly. He was sure now he would go to Bretêche and inspect the cheese factory. He had never seen one.

Besides, what was the mystery about M. La Sainte? He wondered why the question recurred to his mind.

## CHAPTER X

### MÈRE LAFOSSE STILL RETICENT

THE afternoon of that Sunday wore away with more than usual lassitude. Sundays, he began to feel, were the most unwelcome days of his isolation. The complete stoppage of labor filled the countryside with the stillness of a sick-room. The men dawdled through the day whittling and smoking, not knowing what to do with idle hands, or they argued politics at the auberge over coffee and brandy. Their wives, once the cares of the morning and the dinner were past, droned through the afternoon dressed up, visited, and were nervously alert lest the children should spoil their Sunday clothes.

In his present mood, Lloyd questioned unquietly how considerable were the influences of meeting such a woman as Mme.

La Sainte in this environment. Until the day his first glimpse of her woke the memories of the other world, he had been steeped in the fictional atmosphere of his creation.

Mère Lafosse, her husband, the soldiers of the republic, Zoë, the curé, the mayor, were all like so many characters in a play. The country round him, the château with its wild park, were themselves mere stage setting. And he was privileged to sit on the stage and watch the performance. He had been looking forward to the comments that Randolph Cooper would make on his pastoral—Randolph, who saw everything, and talked about everything he saw.

Decidedly Mme. La Sainte was out of the picture. She was just as much out of it as he himself was. Yet she lived here always, it appeared, while his sojourn was the adventure of a summer. Perhaps she had to live here because her husband was a manufacturer of cheeses. He thought to himself with a groan: "What a life!"

After a quite futile attempt to write

letters, he sought his refuge of rainy days, the large, yellowed volume of "Lives of the Saints." He skimmed over a few pages, and came to the conclusion that it was not the right kind of a book for Sunday reading. At least not for him. Putting it back on the shelf, he set out on a wander-tour of musing through the rooms of the old house.

What phantoms, he imagined, moved invisibly with him as he, too, in phantom presence, some day might pace these floors with echoless tread. What phantoms loitered under the roofs of the world wherever a bed, a table, a chair, a fire had made an abiding-place for man. Phantoms we are all, he thought, that amble and strut through the dream-play of life, and wherever we have been there persists some intangible trace of that which has been we.

Returning to his room, he lay down to gaze from his pillow at the lonely tree on the ridge. Suddenly he realized that the spell of Vassilly, of the château, was vanishing.

As had been his coming here, so his quit-

tance of the house, the place, the solitary tree on the ridge would be unforeseen and complete. He should never see again these people into whose lives he had entered by a freakish détour. Even Mme. La Sainte, who unquestionably had not been born a cheesemaker——

He fell asleep and dreamed that he was home, dining in a restaurant—a familiar room, brilliant with lights, the dazzle of jewels, the shine of silver and napery, the sparkle of women's eyes. Opposite sat a woman, daintily yet plainly gowned. She wore no jewels, but in her eyes shone a light, limpid, warm, serene, like moon rays through the purple pane of a church window. All the people in the place were talking, laughing, gesticulating; yet a wonderful quiet lay upon the vast chamber, such a quiet as was in the depths of the eyes of amethyst that were wide before him.

He felt some one sitting at his right and saw Mère Lafosse, her bonnet more glowing than he had ever seen it before.

She was plying her knife expertly on a plate of peas. He turned his head and saw Zoë at his left, eating nothing at all, her face bitter sad with a most comical expression, her clumpy red hands inert on the table. Really they were enormous.

None of the diners gave any notice to his guests until Mère Lafosse turned creakily in her chair and, fixing her sharp black eyes on the head-waiter, who stood far down the room, cried shrilly:

"Eh, down there, *M. le Maire,* make haste, if you please!"

The head-waiter came running. It was the mayor himself!

Lloyd woke, startled. The shrill tones of Mère Lafosse were yet piercing his ears.

She was rapping vigorously on the door of his room.

"All right, all right," he answered.

"It is the supper of monsieur which awaits him."

When he came into the dining-room and found her in her quaint pose, half servant, half mother, he felt better. Undeniably,

Zoë had not lent a restful air to the table. He remonstrated with Mère Lafosse, however, for undertaking to work so soon after her illness.

"It is the best medicine for Lafosse, monsieur," she said. "Besides, rheumatism is not sickness; it is bad luck. If Lafosse always could take the medicine of work, she would never be sick.

"Then, monsieur did not know, but Zoë has not had great chance with the lads. And Sunday is her only day. With the sun shining, and the wheat so high and yellow, and the birds making love all day long, why wouldn't a man think of taking a wife, especially if she is wise enough to hold a little hay before the animal's nose?"

To the accompaniment of her discourse, Mère Lafosse served her patron's supper.

"Alas! Zoë, the poor girl, she might be more alert. She nearly caught Achille Duclos, but the wretch ran away. He was not worth much, still—will monsieur have the other cutlet? No? Some peas, perhaps. Mère Lafosse recommends the peas to monsieur.

"Men are such timid hares nowadays. In truth, they are afraid to get married. One would think the girls wanted to put them in the soup—the bread? Pardon, monsieur—and, then, they are all so crazy for a big dowry. It wasn't so in my time. But monsieur has forgotten the *eau de vie de cidre* for his coffee. *Non?* Monsieur is well, I hope. . . . Ah, it rejoices me—oh, yes, I was begging to tell monsieur that one does not spend all that money to get married simply to raise wheat and potatoes. France needs soldiers, always more soldiers, above all here in Normandy—the sugar, monsieur? It would not take the English long to come over, monsieur knows, if they thought the French got married just for a joke."

Mère Lafosse was silent for a moment, then added speculatively: "I suppose, for example, in America they don't get married so much. They don't have the army to keep up."

Lloyd smiled and said absently: "On the contrary, Mère Lafosse, marriage is rather a general custom there."

"Is it true?" she exclaimed in feigned surprise, and then held her peace.

The abstracted tone of his reply had smitten her with a fear that perhaps she had been talking too much; but she could not help it. She was so glad to be bustling about again in his service.

He saw that she had half a mind to go, and inquired with as disinterested an air as he could command:

"Has Mme. La Sainte any children?"

Once more the face of Mère Lafosse became a mask.

"No, monsieur." She smiled again. "Lucky for her that she has not, for every moment she can spare from her business is given to the care of the sick and needy. She mothers all the children of the neighborhood, and the poor ones most. We have a good many such, you know, though it is a rich country, France. In America, I suppose——"

Lloyd insisted on sticking to the subject.

"She is a charming woman, and you

were good to introduce me to her," he said.

"Yes," Mère Lafosse grinned, "she speaks your kind of French, doesn't she? I knew you'd like that. Here we are so busy always we have no time to talk such French. In my day—you know, I was a milliner's apprentice—I spoke the good French, but now——"

Whether Mère Lafosse perceived a look of weariness in his eyes because he could not keep her talking of Mme. La Sainte, he did not know, but she suddenly interrupted herself to say:

"By the way, monsieur, I almost forgot to give you this letter, which came for you yesterday, and was mislaid."

From the folds of a new serviette, which she had held all during his supper, she took the letter and offered it to him with a bow.

"Good-night, monsieur."

"Good-night, thank you," he replied, as she limped away.

He recognized the handwriting, though

he had not seen an example of it for a long time. Also, he had not thought of the writer in a long time, he pondered.

The letter was from Margery Herbert.

## CHAPTER XI

### MRS. HERBERT WRITES

"My dear Exile," Lloyd read, and imagined the low, long roundness of tone that Mrs. Herbert would give to the metaphorical address if she spoke it.

"What a romantic name you have for your country house, and what a romantic existence you seem to be leading. Are you still in the captivity of its charm? Have you still *not* met the girl? Now you are quite alone, I begin to feel your friends ought to have a new sense of responsibility, lest you marry the girl I pictured for you—pretty face and hair, roughened by exposure; large hands, rather red; and large feet, in large wooden shoes. Do you remember?

"You do, and you laugh at the same time, feeling secure and knowing my 'bad

judgment.' But as Eleanor de Guerville is away, I realize that Little Me is next answerable for your marital salvation. You will say I am generous as usual, but as usual bad of judgment.

"Still, you know, when a man of your dangerous age and attractiveness—ahem! —takes the romantic fancy to live in a lonely château in a lonely country, we wiser women recognize the symptom instanter. He is on the verge of falling in love.

"If I could command a small company of your friends, I should march at the head of them to your Château d'Exil and hem you round against the snares of the blind warrior and his forces.

"Seriously, though, I shall be surprised to learn that you are still content, much as I wish you content always. You certainly must have met some one with whom you can talk on a basis of understanding. Perchance the mayor, or the curé. You didn't tell me whether the mayor is married—and if he has a daughter.

"You see, you've always prided your-

self on being a man's man, and you are. That's just why you will always lean toward the society of women. Soft men have a resource in themselves. They can do knitting, and keep their minds busy about the house. But you're different, and if you don't meet women down there I dread the state of susceptibility you will be in when you return to your proper world.

"My mind is teeming with wise and sober thoughts on this subject, *because my advice has been lately in demand.* (Don't you wish you knew where?) It makes me feel old to see myself as a sage counselor; but a woman does love to give advice, especially a woman who has been married. You said that to me once, and you weren't in very good humor, either, as I recall the occasion. Do you?

"Mother and I are about to fold our tents and migrate once more. This place has not benefited her much—it has been oppressively warm—and after a talk with a new kind of medicine-man she met here, one who is more a healer than a fee-

deviser, she has decided to go to the seashore. He suggested Cabourg, a town not yet made impossible by the summer horde. I've been studying maps and time-tables, and find we shall not be so very far from your country—thirty or forty miles, according to my poor calculation. So, if you find yourself in peril of the peasant heroine you may perhaps flee to Cabourg for refuge. We shall be at the Hôtel de Londres, to begin with.

"I got a letter from Eleanor a fortnight ago telling me that they were having a glorious holiday in Switzerland.

"The de Fesnières are going to open their villa at Trouville, and have asked mother and me to visit them. As I've told you often, I never pretend to say where I shall be within a month's time.

"Do you know Mrs. Alonzo Aiken—New York, of course—a dear girl, though much too fond of her husband, good as he is? I have a note from her this morning, saying she is about to sail for Havre with Evelyn Cooper, Mrs. Strong, you know, and her brother, Randolph

Cooper. Their husbands are coming over directly. If Randolph has his married sister and her married chum in convoy, he can't very well take advantage of the 'free board' you offered at the château, can he? I suppose you have heard all this from Randolph himself. But dear me, what is one to write? You're so completely away from everything except advice, and I've used up all my advice already.

"We shall be at Cabourg surely within a fortnight. *Auf wiedersehen!*

"MARGERY HERBERT.

"P.S. It was so nice of you in your lovely letter to make no allusion to the service you rendered me that night at the railroad station, and for which I am eternally grateful. So far as I am aware, no one knows of it except the three people concerned. Again a thousand thanks.

"M."

The passage in the letter to which Lloyd Avery gave possibly least attention, alluded vaguely to an occasion when Mrs. Herbert's advice had been requisite on

the subject of love and matrimony. The occasion had not been trifling or agreeable.

When she wrote asking Mme. de Fesnières to visit her at Aix-les-Bains, she said frankly that she knew Victor had spoken to his mother of a *certain matter*. To save Mme. de Fesnières any distress, recalling the sympathy she had for her in her anxiety about her son, and also her plans in his regard, she could have wished that Victor had been less precipitate.

Why, he had not revealed himself to her till the very day on which he made his avowal to his mother! She had never dreamed of such an issue, and could attribute it solely to the impetuosity of youth. For she knew that Victor had the best heart in the world. Until he declared that he had spoken to his mother, Mrs. Herbert had hoped and was convinced that she could reason him out of his error. Now, she wished more than ever that Mme. de Fesnières would come to Aix-les-Bains. She herself suffered keenly, and in these matters held that

frankness and clear understanding on all sides were imperative.

She had always cherished Victor as a friend, a fine, manly boy. Was she not nearly ten years his senior? (In truth she was only seven.) Above all, she esteemed the long friendship and kindness of Mme. de Fesnières, and the confidence reposed in her. Though she was not a mother, she could understand a mother's solicitude, especially for her only son.

She begged, therefore, that Mme. de Fesnières come now with her daughter. They would have Victor come a few days later. She had already written to him, and the letter was in the same mail with this.

Mme. de Fesnières accepted the invitation in a long, heartfelt epistle. When she and Mme. Letuire arrived at Aix-les-Bains she informed her hostess that on the same day Mrs. Herbert left Paris, Victor had gone to his country club for an indefinite stay. Mme. de Fesnières had seen that Mrs. Herbert's letter was immediately forwarded to him.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Herbert's mother, Mrs. Stone, and Mme. Letuire, went for a long drive. Mrs. Stone knew nothing of the affair, and Mme. Letuire professed to know nothing, even to her mother. In the parlor of Mme. de Fesnières's suite at the hotel she and her hostess sat in council.

"Your honest letter," said Mme. de Fesnières, "brought the tears to my eyes, my dear friend. Such goodness could not make me admire you more than I have always admired you, but it made me look up to the women of your race as the noblest and most reasonable of all women."

Mrs. Herbert murmured appreciation tremulously. Her large blue eyes glimmered in a mist; her exquisite nostrils dilated; her handsome breast lifted with a long intake of breath. She renewed the protestations of her letter with all the emphasis her low, vibrant voice adjoined.

A knock sounded at the door. Each of them strove to suppress surprise, and the

next instant each touched her eyes lightly with the corner of her handkerchief.

*"Entrez!"* Mme. de Fesnières's command had its habitual firm dignity.

A servant opened the door and presented a card.

Mme. de Fesnières studied it through her lorgnette, and then said in half-revealed embarrassment to Mrs. Herbert:

"It is my son."

"Perhaps I had better leave you for a while." Mrs. Herbert rose quickly as she spoke.

Mme. de Fesnières rose also, her eyebrows drawn together in perplexity.

"If you think it best, dear friend—for a few moments."

Then she instructed the servant to conduct M. de Fesnières to her. The servant bowed and withdrew, closing the door.

Mme. de Fesnières held out her hand to Mrs. Herbert, who clasped it warmly. The elder woman pressed her lips against the younger's brow.

Again a knock sounded on the door.

The women looked at each other questioningly.

"It must be some one else," Mrs. Herbert whispered.

*"Entrez!"* said Mme. de Fesnières slowly.

The door was swung wide and the same servant murmured respectfully: "M. de Fesnières."

Victor entered quickly, and stopped, abashed. The door was pulled shut behind him.

After greeting them, he said apologetically: "I was waiting by the lift at the end of the hall. You will pardon my impatience, I hope, mother. My train leaves in twenty minutes."

"But, my dear son, you are hardly arrived!" exclaimed Mme. de Fesnières. "Let us be seated, pray."

"I got here half an hour ago. I couldn't remember the name of the hotel and had to search for you."

"You must not think of going away so soon," Mrs. Herbert interposed. "I was expecting you the day after to-morrow."

"It was very good of you to ask me," Victor replied. "I came down partly to say I am sorry I can't accept the invitation."

"My dear Victor," his mother entreated, "do stay with us. It is beautiful here."

"I am happy nowhere now," he responded, almost as if in soliloquy. "I should be more than unhappy here. I should be in torture."

"My dear son," Mme. de Fesnières spoke sadly, "one of the defects of youth is to be wilful in unhappiness."

"Mother, I beg of you, please do not talk to me out of your experience now."

Mme. de Fesnières looked into his flashing eyes for a moment, then bowed her head.

"You must admit, Victor," said Mrs. Herbert, "that your mother's age and experience justify her to try at least to show you the right way of things."

"My dear son," Mme. de Fesnières said solemnly, "you must not forget that in this friend," she inclined her proud white head toward Mrs. Herbert, "you have met

one of the noblest and most unselfish of women. In years to come you will appreciate her as I do now."

"In years to come," Victor retorted coolly, "I shall know everything. That's the burden of the song I've heard ever since I can remember. Permit me to say, my dear friends, that as far as I can judge of the happiness of those who are in advance of me, I don't think the knowledge is worth waiting for. One must live one's own way. A man's life is not a tailor's pattern."

Mme. de Fesnières remained silent. Her silence weighed upon the room like lead. Tears were stealing down her wrinkled cheeks.

Mrs. Herbert rose. "Victor," she said to him, "I am sorry you could not be reasonable. I am sorry you will not, or cannot, remain here with your mother, your sister, your real friends. One must live one's own way, I suppose, as you say, but at the same time one must respect the rights, and, what are more sacred still, the feelings of others."

Victor held her hand a moment as she turned away. A flush mantled his cheeks.

"You have never understood me," he said quietly. "But you have always meant to be good and just, I know. I shall remember that, as I hope you will forgive me for what I have said here—*for everything.*"

The large blue eyes glimmered in mist. The nostrils dilated, the bosom rose and fell.

"I have done my best," Mrs. Herbert murmured tremulously, and went from the room with noiseless steps.

Mme. de Fesnières's chin was heavy against her breast. The click of the latch in the door elicited no sign from her.

Victor moved to her chair and kissed her forehead. Then, laying one hand on hers, clasped in her lap, he stooped to his knee beside her.

"My dear mother," he began tenderly, "I feel that I commit a crime when I make you suffer. Try to forget my impetuous words. Think how it seems to me I have been treated in this matter. I have

been spoken to and advised, and you and she, in all goodness, have considered me as though I were a schoolboy. I am a boy to you. I know I shall be always, and I dearly love you. But it was maddening to have *her* take that attitude."

"She did it in all honesty and prudence, my son."

"But she has made me ridiculous."

"It is you who do not understand, Victor." The mother laid her head against his fondly. "She is thirty; you are just twenty-three."

"When she is forty I shall be thirty-three, and the years tell more as they go. She said that to me herself. Still, I believed she was all wrong; and we're never so wrong as when we honestly mean to be right."

"Ah, my son, one's theories run so smoothly."

Victor was silent for a moment, then said: "Perhaps none of us is entirely right now, mother. Let us wait. I came down to tell you this."

"Victor," his mother began, after some

reflection, "when we are at Trouville I am going to make the ten days' retreat at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. I have heard from Stéphanie——"

Mme. de Fesnières became suddenly silent and looked down into his eyes.

"Is she going to the convent with you?" he asked.

"I have suggested it," the mother confessed.

"Her husband came to the club while I was there," said Victor, irrelevantly.

"Quite recovered, then?"

"His arm is still in splints and he looks pale. He told me the doctors said the worst injury he had suffered was nervous shock. I thought he looked rather bad."

"Stéphanie spoke very kindly of you, Victor."

"And of my sister, too, I have no doubt. I've always liked her, mother, and I wish I could be at Trouville to meet her, but——"

"Oh, she hasn't agreed to go to the convent with me. In any case, you will be

with sister and me at Trouville, will you not?"

"I would willingly, mother, if I had not made other plans. I came to tell you of them. I'm going away soon—Saturday, perhaps—on"—he hesitated—"on a kind of hunting expedition with some fellows of the club."

"An expedition?" His mother's face shadowed. "Not far away, I hope?" She spoke very slowly. "Nor for long?"

"We're going to Labrador, in America, you know." He hurried over the words. "We shall buy our supplies and things over there." He felt his mother's hands clutch his nervously. "Oh, we'll be as safe as if we were here. We shall have guides and——"

"Labrador! That's a wilderness!" his mother gasped.

Her face whitened; her lips were compressed in a blue line.

"Oh, no, not at—besides, I can go to Trouville for a short——"

He stopped sharply and stood up.

The strain of the whole scene had been

too great. Mme. de Fesnières fainted. Victor caught her head on his arm as it fell back, and dragged her inert form to the couch. Then, ringing the bell with snapping pressure, he rushed to her bedroom, where he knew her medicine-chest was always ready on the table.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ENIGMATIC SMILE

Lloyd Avery had told Mère Lafosse he would ride that morning. It was Thursday. He had waited one, two, three days before accepting the invitation to see the cheese manufactory at Bretêche. Somehow it seemed longer, and that lonely Sunday afternoon much farther away.

In the courtyard Fernand held the black mare in saddle and bridle, awaiting him. She had not been out for two days, and when they were clear of the archway that led under the house she galloped along the white road, her velvet coat lustrous in the sun. The workaday world was astir in the teeming fields; life and energy throbbed in his veins. He questioned his late impulse to drift away from Vassilly.

At the crossroads the mare, out of habit,

turned her head toward Falaise. He drew the left rein and they took a new road, the road to the cheesemaker's. In a little while they were climbing the ridge he contemplated often from his window. Beyond two fields at his right stood his communing tree. He waved his crop in smiling salute. At the movement of his arm the mare sprang ahead more rapidly, and soon they entered the wood, in which Bretêche lay hidden against the heart of a hill. Here and there a small stream crossed the road under bridges of shaven tree-trunks. The way wound leisurely in and out till it stretched itself on a shelf of land amid a few stone cottages.

Proceeding at a walk, he came upon a wide, flat, long building built lower down, where the stream was precipitated through a gash in the hillside. Two or three men he saw moving busily about the place to the perpetual clatter of the water. They looked up as he passed, bowed, and went their way.

Farther on in the valley, where the landscape resumed its common character of

fertile plain, he saw a handsome, spacious house. That must certainly be a château, if the neatly kept ruin he inhabited was entitled to the appellation. It would be better to announce himself to Mme. La Sainte there. He touched the mare lightly and she broke into a canter.

"There must be money in the cheese business," he said to himself, glancing back at the manufactory with its air of machine precision and system, so inconsonant with the picturesque ruggedness of the region.

At the entrance of the house mare and rider chafed for some time before a maid appeared in answer to the bell. Her eyes were staring wide.

"Is Mme. La Sainte at home?" he inquired.

The maid continued her uncomprehending stare a moment, bobbed her head, and, wheeling abruptly in her sabots, clattered off, leaving him standing at the open door.

He thought he had ascertained the limit of rustic timidity at Vassilly.

"That was before I had seen Bretêche,"

he said to himself. Patting the mare's neck idly, he gazed up at the sleepy windows and hearkened to the strange quiet of the house.

Presently a young fellow came from somewhere at a plodding run, obsequiously pulled a tuft of hair on his forehead, and asked permission to take the mare. Lloyd gave him the bridle, and was watching him lead her away, when behind him he heard a woman's voice.

"Will monsieur please come in?"

He turned immediately, snatching his cap from his head.

The woman who received him was sallow, short, and bulky of figure. She must have been about fifty, walked under duress with an ebony cane, wore a stately old-fashioned black dress, and spoke with little or no trace of the country accent. Wound about the hand that gripped her cane he observed a rosary of black beads.

She bowed him into a rather chilly and spiritless antechamber, assuring him of the infinite regret madame would have when she learned that he had not found

her at home. A gloomy foreboding of half an hour's conversation with this woman, whom he could not fix as servant or relative, swept through him coldly. He asked whether madame was gone for the day.

The woman affirmed, quite to the contrary, that madame should arrive in a few minutes. She was making an inspection of the works this morning; but word had been sent that monsieur was waiting.

"You must not bother her to come here," he protested. "I'll go back there. I wouldn't think of disturbing her."

The woman tried to convince him that madame would be only too happy to receive his visit. Still, he had come, no doubt, to see the works, and if monsieur preferred to go up there at once, would monsieur please suit his desire? Monsieur knew the way? To be sure.

He thanked the woman warmly and bade her good-day.

Only a short distance up the road he met Mme. La Sainte coming toward him. She wore a linen dress of dark blue, and

a dainty apron, fastened at the shoulders as well as at the girdle. She had a white bonnet on, too, which was fairly dazzling here in the green shade of the valley.

The linen dress suited admirably the lines of her figure, that figure which—assuredly she had not been born a cheese-maker! Her heavy dark hair glowed even in this subdued light, and curling wisps strayed above her ears, which were pink, he noted, and not too small. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes—he knew their color now—were brighter than he had ever seen them before. (How many times had he seen them? he asked himself inwardly.) She had been hurrying, no doubt.

"Really, madame, you are too good to let yourself be interrupted like this," he told her as she offered her hand in greeting. "I was on my way to find you, you see."

"It is no trouble, monsieur," she returned, smiling. Her teeth were small and perfectly aligned. "Besides, you know, visitors are rare at our house, and

I wished to be sure there had been no awkwardness."

The American expressed appreciation of the elderly woman who had received him.

"That is Aunt Cecile," Mme. La Sainte explained. "Yes, she would know. But you wish to see how we make the cheeses. Perhaps you will be bored before we get through, yet you will be able to say you have seen, and that's the end of all sightseeing, I suppose."

It was true, though he could not admit it, that machinery or manufactures of any kind had little interest for him. If this was a cheese manufactory, and he believed what everybody said, the important desideratum was that it produce good cheese. One ate the cheese, if one liked cheese; but that one liked good cheese was no argument that one cared to see how good cheese was made.

Still, what had cheesemaking to do with the magic of her voice, the fascination of her gesture and expression, as they whiled away half an hour, even though she did

talk only of cheese and cheese production? The workmen eyed him askance, while apparently in undiverted attention at their labors. He was hardly more than conscious of them as images. At times, too, he lost track of the thread of her talk, so profound and mysterious was the medley of his impressions. Surely she had not been born a cheesemaker! It must be that she had simply married into the business.

As they were leaving the place he noticed that the men had stopped work and were issuing from the building. At the moment he did not understand this pause in the middle of the morning; but when they reached the house, and he had desired of Mme. La Sainte that she summon the stable-boy with his mount, the maid put in another timorous appearance with:

*"Madame, la collation est servie."*

"You will be late for the collation at Dorp," said Mme. La Sainte. "Will you share it here, with Aunt Cecile and me?"

"That's one repast," he said, "that I've not been able to include, since coming to

Vassilly. I breakfast at seven, you know."

"How late!" she returned, smiling. "Here we breakfast at half-past five."

"Then you earn every right to the collation, madame."

The elderly lady who first received him came hobbling into the hall. She had put on a fresh bonnet and a collar of lace that ended in tiny folds on her bosom.

"It is quite ready, madame," she interposed.

"Aunt Cecile," said Mme. La Sainte, "this is *M. l'Américain* of the Château de Dorp."

"I knew him at once," replied the old woman. "Monsieur must be hungry after looking at so many cheeses. I have told Gervais, madame, to look after the horse of monsieur. It is a long ride from Dorp."

"I'm afraid I've imposed too much on your hospitality already," said the American.

"One is not in town," Aunt Cecile returned quickly. "In the country, a visit

is not a visit unless one has something to eat."

Mme. La Sainte and her guest laughed at the conviction with which Aunt Cecile marked the contrast between town and rustic usage.

"Still, Aunt Cecile is right," Mme. La Sainte said.

"To tell the truth," the American admitted, smiling, "I know I shall be delighted to share the collation."

*"A la bonne heure!"* said Aunt Cecile. "One is not devastated with visitors here, or at Dorp, I suppose, monsieur."

"Not at Dorp decidedly," he replied.

Mme. La Sainte left them alone a few moments as they were going into the dining-room.

"Madame is so good as to call me aunt," the woman explained, "yet in fact I am only her old governess, whom she has made one of her own. But I love her almost as her mother loved her. *Si je l'aime,"* the old woman's voice rose an octave, "why, everybody here, at Vassilly, everywhere loves her. Who could help

loving her? It is easy to be lovable when life is all *couleur de rose;* but when one has suffered, ah, such suffering, monsieur—and she a mere girl——"

Aunt Cecile stopped. Mme. La Sainte was entering the somber, imposing dining-room. She had doffed her bonnet and apron.

As a passage from some dim remembered melody, echoed in his brain the words of Aunt Cecile: "Who could help loving her?"

Oh, no, she was never born a cheesemaker! What was more, he did not believe now that she could ever have even married a cheesemaker. Then he cautioned himself inwardly against the unreliability of first impressions. If only he might meet M. La Sainte, how much more clearly he could judge of her!

Two high windows opened on the balconied terrace, where the collation was served in the mild summer air. Through a rift in the trees they could see a herd of cows grazing in a lush stretch of meadow.

"So much comfort of society," the American was saying, "such gentle hospitality, *chère madame,* is ruinous to my purpose as an exile."

Aunt Cecile had gone. They were at coffee. He was smoking a cigarette—such a cigarette, he fancied, as he had not savored in many a day.

The herd of cows had drifted from their range of vision. The flame of the mounting sun glowed on the meadow.

"Don't you think," she queried, with a smile, "that, perhaps, it will make you appreciate more the blessings of your lonely state?"

"Is anybody sure of his likes or dislikes?"

"Do they matter, unless there's a real, a serious, purpose behind them?"

"I thought I had one, as I told you a while ago, when I confessed my longing for the far-away. It was not, I suppose, real, serious. It brought me to Dorp. Then, lately—no, suddenly—I began to ask myself why I was staying there, why ever I had come there.

"It was the lure again beckoning—a will-o'-the-wisp, I misdoubt, that one follows futilely to the end. If the question were not always absorbingly, insistently present, I could laugh at the folly of it." He smiled rather sadly. "Don't you ever ask yourself why you are doing what you do? I imagine everybody interviews himself."

She laughed softly. "If I had time perhaps I might."

"Would you find an answer?"

Her eyelids lifted, then lowered quickly. No purer flush had ever bloomed in woman's face, he thought.

"Forgive me," he cried, apologetically, "and believe that I am not merely curious. I was telling you about myself, and somehow it seemed natural that I should"—he stammered a moment—"I'm afraid I've been spoiled at Dorp. You see, when Mère Lafosse isn't asking me questions, I'm asking them of her. There's so much to ask about. You'll forgive me, please."

He gazed into the eyes of shadowed

amethyst with frank regret. Some memory of a smile flashed there and was gone.

"It is so rarely anybody comes here to ask questions," she replied, "that I'm not sure whether our vanity is not flattered. It is such a simple dull life, and yet so full of repose. Though one can hardly appreciate it merely as an observer. One has to be part of it."

She laid down her cup and saucer, and he took new note of the delicate modeling of her hand. Again memories of that other world were stirred. If he had met her in Paris, instead of here, how would she have seemed?

"I suppose I'm part of nothing, and that's my trouble," he ventured ruefully.

"Mère Lafosse has told me that you paint."

"I ask questions about painting, as I do about everything, by putting down lines and color, in a hesitant, skeptical way. In fact, I think I'm rather a tiresome person. I know I am, to myself." He laughed. "I fear I shall be to you, unless I go, madame. Besides, I'm an

idler; you, most enviable, are a worker." He rose, offering his hand.

As their eyes met he felt there was a sadness in her smile. By what impulse he knew not, whether it was a triumph in his reading of her, or a sympathetic recollection of Aunt Cecile's veiled allusion to past suffering of her mistress, but he murmured hazardously:

"You find the humor of tears in my envy of your lot, don't you?"

"It is so easy for one person to imagine the content of another," she returned, and laughed disquietedly.

"Because it is the way of the world to talk in masks, madame."

"And if the signal to unmask——"

He interposed with an intrepid smile: "I should say you had known sorrow. And you would say of——"

*"S'il vous plaît, madame."*

At the sound of a third voice they both turned in surprise toward the window, where the maid stood waiting.

The maid's message was that Léon Lafosse, the eldest of the four soldiers of

the republic, had come with a request from his father, that Mme. La Sainte be good enough to lend him two of her workmen for the morrow. Le Père Bisco feared rain, and needed help to get all the hay in by the same night.

Mme. La Sainte said she would see Léon in a moment, and instructed the maid to have Gervais bring the visitor's horse to the door.

"I thank you, madame," he said; "you pile debts on my insolvent head bewilderingly. For to-day I owe you an interval of serene delight. For Sunday I owe you that glimpse of a part of life here, which was quite denied to me. Really, it was an astonishing kindness to a stranger within the gates."

"There are no strangers here, only neighbors, *M. l'Américain.*" The light touch of her hand in his was an item of all the charm and grace she breathed.

He said, laughing: "Oh, you're not going to call me that now, are you? My name——"

"That is your name here," she inter-

rupted, with an enigmatic smile. "So you will always be known and spoken of, even when you are gone. Remember Père Bisco. Besides, is not your life here an ephemeral episode? What matters it——"

She became silent under his searching gaze. The humid red tone of her lips paled, though the radiant eyes of amethyst met his unfalteringly. Understanding, vague, yet penetrant, waved between them.

Involuntarily, his arms moved a little from his sides, the fingers of his hands half distended, as he told her, in a low, measured voice, which seemed to be the conclusion of lightning-swift reflection:

"And as you are Mme. La Sainte!"

Lids veiled the eyes of amethyst, and at the corners of the mouth lurked shadows of the enigmatic smile. Lloyd had come to Bretêche curious, and feeling that his curiosity would be easily satisfied. There could not be much to learn about a lady cheesemaker, even if her husband did seem oddly obscured. As he rode out of the valley he admitted to himself that he was mystified.

## CHAPTER XIII

### "TILL SOON AGAIN!"

THE rising moon searched the valley of Bretêche, and Gervais stood revealed before the house of Mme. La Sainte, holding her horse by the bridle, feeling the girths and smoothing from its coat spots of roughness that had escaped the comb. In a moment madame herself stood there, murmured a few words to the boy, while he held the stirrup, sprang lightly into the saddle, and rode away.

She was going, at her customary interval, to the curé to be confessed. There were times when the young woman's soul inquiries dragged from forgotten depths all that M. le Curé, as a seminarian, had been able to seize and possess of the theologies. This was such an occasion, and when she bade him good-night, with many

thanks, M. le Curé looked at his watch and drew a sigh. He had long pages of his office yet to read. He sighed again, a sigh of gratitude, that the others of his parishioners were blessed with plain, uncomplicated consciences, guilty when guilty, of clean-cut infractions of the commandments.

The penitent also sighed, as she turned the horse toward home. The tempered light of the moon, on the white road and on the shorn fields, that breathed their perfume in silvered mist, softened the melancholy that steeped her spirit. For the anguish and terror of the livelong years had returned in ghostly presence. Tragedy, whom she had evaded so long, stalked again beside her, as a familiar. The recollection of days and nights of chill darkness numbed her nerves. She clenched the bridle-reins tightly, to reassure herself.

With morning, she thought consolingly, the mood would be gone. . . . But he would still be here at Vassilly, at Dorp. No doubt he would come again to Bretêche. Had she asked him? She could

not recall. In this, her secret sanctuary from the world, she not only could not avoid him, but they seemed even destined to drift toward each other, as like to like. The next instant she smiled at her wild imagining.

What was there perilous or distasteful in knowing him? His first visit had, somehow, startled her hidden sorrow; but when next they met they would talk of local things, as neighbors, and not as kinfolk, chancing together in the isolation of a strange country. She would not say so much of herself then; nor would he divine so much.

It was the hinted disclosure of her malady that tormented her with new consciousness of it. How much, really, had he been able to guess from her utterances? It was comforting to think that a man would not be nearly so deft in unraveling the skein of vague suggestion; and, of course, she would never have said so much to a woman. He seemed to see farther than the average man. Yet, how could

she be sure of this? It was so long since she had talked with a man of her class.

At any rate, he possessed, through no merit of his own, the charm of novelty for her. His voice was good, too—of the kind that seems to vibrate with the steady courage of the man. . . . Yes, if one had courage—had she been a coward?

Her days were days of toil and loneliness; while she had wondered at life, which she had lived only to learn, and which, known, was dull pain. And her longing became that of all mortals, the restless pursuit of an anodyne.

In her maiden years how she had craved to cross the borders of life's mystery, to be in the secrets of the world of men and women. Since then, how had she shut her tearful eyes against the future, or turned, not with regret, to the past, but with a shudder at its futility.

Thus she went on, hoping that, nay, fearing lest, to-morrow would be other than the monotone of to-day.

The dread to-morrow had come, in the hazard descent of the invader from her

far-distant world. In the beginning she had heard, with foreboding, of his presence at Dorp. Yet him she did not fear. Nor was it he who awoke her interest. He was a mere symbol. It was the life he represented—that illusion she had once so desired and had savored so bitterly.

Suddenly, fragments of melody struck upon her ear. She pulled up the horse, who had lapsed into a lazy walk.

Some distance ahead, a group of harvesters were making their way across the fields. Their bent figures, dark as shadows, moved at long strides. They looked unreal.

She gave rein to the horse, and he started again slowly. Listening, she recognized the song they were singing:

*Enfants, c'est moi qui suis Lisette,*
*La Lisette du chansonnier,*
*Dont vous chantez plus d'une chansonette*
*Matin et soir sous le vieux maronnier.*
*Ce chansonnier dont le pays sonore*
*Oui, mes enfants, m'aime d'un tendre*
*amour,*

*Son souvenir m'enorguellit encore*
*Et charmera jusqu'à mon dernier jour!*

A figure loomed in her path. She studied it as they neared each other. No one in Vassilly, except the American, had that erect carriage, that litheness of muscle and form. He was carrying a rake on his shoulder, and when he came nearer she saw that his sleeves were rolled up. His coat lay across his free arm. She marveled, seeing him thus.

He came quite close, looking intently and apparently not knowing who she was. Her face was in the shade of a broad-brimmed hat.

"Good-evening," he said, as he would have spoken to any passer-by.

"Good-evening, monsieur."

They were passing each other.

He stepped to her side. She held the horse involuntarily.

"Why, it's you, madame!" he exclaimed. "I was wondering who in the world—that's a handsome hat, I'm sure, or you

wouldn't wear it. It's better even as a mask, though."

She laughed softly. "Did you think me a highwayman?"

"I'm delighted to see you, but especially that you see me in these togs. I've ruined a decent golf suit, and in a good cause. I've done the first hard day's work of my life. The proof is that Bisco says he owes me two francs' pay. I left them crossing the fields. I'm all out of tobacco, and on my way to Chaumont's."

"How do you like working for a living?" she asked.

"The pay seems mighty small, when I think of the pain in my back and the blisters on my hands. I must be awfully out of training. Yet I should hate to have to live at this business."

"Was it Mère Lafosse who told you to make haste and get to work?" She was smiling down at him. "If she lets you ask questions all the time, as you said yesterday, you must expect to have her retaliate in her own way."

"Oh, no. She didn't even hint that I

should join the emergency battalion. It was some one else."

"Hardly Bisco?"

"You were the one, madame. You said one ought to be more than a mere observer."

"But, monsieur, if——" The horse got restive, and she paused to give her attention to him.

The American made a step toward the bit. As he did so, the long rake slipped from his grasp, described a semicircle, and fell with a clatter in front of the horse's nose. Shocked by the phenomenon of sight and sound, the little beast leaped viciously forward, against the whole weight and strength of the rider. Dropping his coat, the American dashed in pursuit. When he came up with her, a few moments later, she was pulling the horse almost upon his haunches, as they turned round and round. He seized the reins short, and patted the horse's neck soothingly.

"Permit me to compliment you, madame," he told her, "on your management

and your muscle." He added, laughing: "I suppose you attribute your athletic condition to the fact that you never eat any but Bretêche cheese."

"No," she retorted, smiling, "to the fact that no woman would let her horse get away from her in the presence of a man who runs so badly."

"I've been working all day, please don't forget. I feel as though I had walked here from Paris."

"If you have any strength left in your arms, will you hold this silly horse while I get down? We've loosened the girths in our maneuvers."

Still holding the bridle, he extended his free hand as she alighted. She took care of the horse then, while he tightened the girths. Then he turned, his back close to the saddle, and reached to relieve her of the reins. He looked into her face, luminously pale in the eye of the moon.

"Your hat?" he questioned with a smile.

She patted it with one hand, and tried it to make sure it was fast.

"It will stay on," she said, "and there's no one to see me, if it isn't quite right."

"I think it's hanging back now," he ventured with masculine uncertainty. "The mask effect is gone. Do you know, if you hadn't spoken, I'm afraid we should have passed without a word. I've seen you so seldom. I remember how you looked that Sunday, in the doorway, at Dorp. I remember how you looked when I met you yesterday as you were coming up to the house. I remember how you looked one day in the post-office at Falaise," his voice lowered, "before we had met. You see, when one first becomes acquainted with people, one knows them only as they look in certain lights, with certain expressions. I shall remember you as I see you now."

"If you remember all that," she smiled dimly, "you will have no excuse for not knowing me in future, will you?"

"I shall surely not forget the wonder-worker who persuaded me to do one honest day's toil at forty sous."

"Don't you work again to-morrow?"

"They don't need me, and Bisco has to keep his pay-roll low, you know. Haven't you a place for one sober, industrious, and willing to learn, at the factory?"

She laughed prettily: "I told you I have men there now who have very little to do."

"And nearly all the workmen have a share in the profits. Bisco told me so this morning. You're a bit of a socialist, aren't you?" he asked.

"Nothing so elaborate, I assure you, monsieur."

"I've been thinking that I'd be a socialist, or worse, if I had to work every day at forty sous, and couldn't get work even then."

"Every man can get work of some kind, they say."

"They say, but it's hard to believe. You see, my misfortune is that I lack experience." He added lightly: "But I may pick up a job, if I stay here long enough."

"Here's one now," she said, reaching

for the reins; "will you help me into the saddle?"

He made a step of his hands and, for an instant, felt the pressure of her little foot. As she seated herself, he caught her hand and drew it slowly toward his lips.

"Please—you must not!" she remonstrated.

"Is not the laborer worthy of his hire?" he asked, his strong, comely face poised upward so that she could see his earnest eyes. "You won't refuse?" The pleading of the words seemed to conceal all the energy and dominance that showed in the firm nose and mouth, in the lines of the throat and shoulders. "Such a slight boon for you to accord; such a memory for me of the dream-life I live in this world of dreams. And into this my exile you come a friend and peer from the vast outside. We meet unknowing, and straightway we know each other by the symbols and traces of the wilderness from which we have fled. For you, too, are an exile. Yes, though you have not said so, and though I make no attempt to understand, still, I am sure

that you wander in alien paths." He pressed his lips against her hand. It trembled in the glove.

"You imagine too much about a humble cheesemaker, monsieur," and she smiled with the faintest suggestion of mockery in her lips.

"I have divined much," he replied.

"You are given to dreams, monsieur."

"To dreams? Why, everybody dreams, everybody divines. We go through our lives in the same medley of ceremonies and routine that has obtained for thousands of years. And yet that other self of us abides always within, noting, reflecting, divining, and knows that within everybody else—neighbor, friend, enemy, strangers on the way—the other self abides also, noting, reflecting, divining. It is our inner selves that have hailed each other on the way. Am I not right, madame?"

"You are rather disquieting, if you don't mind my saying so," she laughed musically. "You wish me to go home seeing phantoms."

"You aren't timid? I'll walk beside you."

"You said your knees ached. Besides, the horse and I know the road so well. Thank you. I'll say good-night."

"Don't say that, madame. Good-night may be a last good-by."

She laughed to reassure herself. "Is it the moon and the new-mown hay that make Americans romantic?"

"May I call soon again?" he asked.

She smiled and answered: "If you'll send in your application for work in writing, monsieur, with references——"

"Oh, I have the best of references."

"Have you?"

"Are you still going to say good-night?"

"We are neighbors, monsieur. All neighbors hereabouts when they part for a day or for years say 'till soon again.'"

"I shall remember you as I see you now," he returned, looking into the depths of her shadowed eyes.

She touched the horse smartly with her

crop, waved her hand, and whisked down the white road, a fairy rider in the glow of the moon.

## CHAPTER XIV

### "BON VOYAGE"

L'AMÉRICAIN was finishing his midday dinner when Mère Lafosse came in trepidation with some letters and a telegram.

"No bad news for monsieur?" she said.

To her mind, nothing but a calamity justified a telegram.

He tore the envelope open and read:

"Randolph ill. Rather anxious. He wants to see you. Hotel Ulysse, Paris.

"EVELYN COOPER STRONG."

The message had been retransmitted by his bankers. He ought to have got it the night before, but there was no wire to Vassilly.

"Bad news?" asked Mère Lafosse,

studying his face shrewdly as he read the message a second time.

"Not very good news. A friend of mine is sick. I've got to go to Paris."

"Impossible!" she exclaimed, much as if he had said she would have to go.

"I wish they had told me what's the matter with him," Lloyd commented, half aloud. "He may be dead, or all better, before I get there. Mère Lafosse, where can I find out about the trains?"

"The postman's coming back, monsieur. He knows. He thought perhaps there would be an answer."

"There is. I'll write it at once, and pack my things. Fernand can drive me to the station, I suppose?"

"To be sure, monsieur. Monsieur takes his trunk? Only bags? Very well. The high cart, then. I run, monsieur," and the old woman hobbled away bustlingly.

When the postman called, on his way back to town, Lloyd was awaiting him, telegram in hand. His luggage had already been put in the cart, harnessed to Poulin, Mère Lafosse's own young horse.

The last train from Falaise that day, to connect with the Paris express, left at a quarter to two.

"If monsieur were driven to the station in"—the postman observed his nickel watch deliberately—"in forty minutes, he would be in Paris this night about nine o'clock—that is," the postman added politely, "if monsieur desired thus to derange himself."

Lloyd said he would get the train.

"I'll put fire to Fernand's heels," Mère Lafosse cried, struggling away to the house, where, in the upper room, Fernand was having trouble with his collar. He wore his black blouse and Sunday hat.

"Make haste! make haste!" the mother shrilled to him from below. "You'll never catch a rabbit, my son, unless it's tied to you."

Fernand came down grumbling about useless hurry when one had Poulin to drive. He climbed into the cart and drove over to take his distinguished passenger.

The moment of good-by found the old mother's eyes full of tears. "Come back,

monsieur," she stammered. "Make haste to come back. One will be lonely here."

"Will you say good-by to the others for me?" He wrung her hand, not a little affected by her sorrowful mien. It was long since he had experienced a regret so simple and so penetrating.

Fernand's round face froze in amazement at his importance on this unusual occasion.

The cart turned to go out, when straight, stiff, colossal Zoë came running from the garden, her face and hands redder than *l'Américain* had ever seen them. She held up over the wheel a little bouquet of roses and carnations.

"Will monsieur take them for the friend who is sick?" Her eyes were tearful and the corners of her mouth drooped in woe.

He took the flowers, shook her great hand, and murmured a word of thanks. "Adieu!" he added, and to his surprise the word came huskily.

*"Hue-da!"* Fernand whistled the horse and launched his whip savagely in the air. Poulin leaped frantically and tore the cart

toward the archway as though they were going to a fire.

*L'Américain,* looking back at Mère Lafosse and Zoë, waved the flowers in farewell.

They shook their hands, and Mère Lafosse cried: *"Bon voyage, monsieur!"*

*"Bon voyage, monsieur,"* Zoë echoed, and he saw her hand go to her eyes.

With a jerk that nearly unseated him, the cart turned into the high-road, and he saw them no more in the frame of the archway.

The faded walls and the tiled roof of Dorp basked in the afternoon sun; and, gazing at the shining windows, a wonder came upon him whether he should ever inhabit the place again. Would it be the same?

They reached the crossroads. The cart swung to the right; he was looking to the left, toward Bretêche.

"Your life here is an ephemeral episode," she had said.

He would send her a note, explaining his departure and saying he hoped soon

to return to the château. Fernand might take the note, which—— No, it would be better that no one should have any clue to gossip. He could send the note through the mail. Even Lafosse received letters addressed to him as M. Bisco.

Yet, by what right could he send her a letter? She had received him as a neighbor at her house with her duenna. She had talked with him in the moonlight on the open road because they were neighbors. Her reason for considering him she had made clear; and he had ventured wild flights of sentiment, impersonal, actually, and yet such as he would never utter in a crowd.

Was it the loneliness to which he had been prey, the moonlight and the reaped fields, the symbol she was of the far-away world he had always known, that had whirled him into madness? Was it she herself? No. Nothing she could do, nothing he would dare, had effected such a position in the chessboard of their meetings.

It was impossible, of course, for him to write to her. Mère Lafosse would inform her of his abrupt departure, as naturally as she would give her other news of Vassilly.

In Paris he would see Randolph, other old friends, and perhaps Margery Herbert. It was too bad that Randolph was ill. If Margery Herbert should be there——

Fernand broke into his mood with the remark that all the rain was not at the North Pole, and pointed to one quarter of the sky with his whip.

The American gave absent-minded credit to the prediction, and Fernand, judging his traveler disinclined to conversation, addressed his further comment to Poulin.

They sped jerkily past fields, where workers glanced up to wave a hail as they recognized the horse and cart; clattered through villages, like Vassilly, but each more centered and imposing, as it was nearer the town; then, slowly down the long slope that led to the main street of

Falaise, ladder-like in its ascent to the railroad.

Fernand pulled up before the station almost on the minute of train-time; but, as all the trains started nearly five minutes behind schedule, the American had time to pick a few papers from the book-stall after buying his ticket.

Fernand carried the bags to a smoking compartment, and touched his hat with an air, in acknowledgment of the silver he received.

The American shook his hand warmly. The universal sadness of parting was in his heart. . . . The train moved out sluggishly.

On the platform, Fernand ran a few yards, waving his hat, then cried: *"Bon voyage, monsieur!"* and was lost.

The train was in open country, and Lloyd thought he would drop the bouquet of Zoë out the window. He was about to do so, when it struck him as rather slighting of a generous impulse. She might, perhaps, be picturing him bearing the

flowers to the bedside of his friend. He reflected. Decidedly, he could not ride through Paris with a rustic nosegay. The flowers would all have drooped and faded before he got there, anyway. He raised his arm to throw them out.

The train had just come to a road-crossing. A tall, lean woman stood beside the track, with her brass horn and warning flag. His eyes met hers, and she smiled hospitably. He threw the nosegay to her.

*"Merci! Bon voyage!"* she shrilled piercingly above the roar of the train.

Thus Mère Lafosse, and Zoë, and Fernand had wished him godspeed. *Bon voyage*—and whither? To Paris, surely; and afterward . . . How fragile and unreal she had seemed, beneath the moon, wrapped in the scented mist of the fields!

He recalled the lingering sweetness of her voice: "You are given to dreams, monsieur!"

*"La belle France,"* he thought, "where everybody, from the mysterious lady of Bretêche to a flag-woman, had the grace

of sentiment, and the words and smile to give it out like sunshine!"

Mme. La Sainte and Zoë! When all else of Vassilly should pass into memory, they would still loiter before his eyes. Lady and maid-of-all-work, and each a woman, with the like woman's make-up for all the breach of station.

He smiled cynically at the jumble his thoughts fell into always, lighted a cigar, as a counter-irritant, and began, as he purposed, to think of Randolph Cooper. What might be his illness? Would it break into the plan of his summer? What had become of his plan since the lady cheesemaker loomed in view?

Undeniably, she had spoiled the stage-setting of his adventure in exile.

## CHAPTER XV

### RANDOLPH'S TROUBLES

About ten o'clock that night Lloyd arrived in Paris. He sent his bags to the hotel at which he had stopped before, and took a cab to the Ulysse, to make inquiries about Randolph Cooper. He had to wait some time for a reply to his card. The messenger brought it back, saying Mr. Cooper had written the answer on it.

In a penciled scrawl he read:

"Not dead yet, b'gosh! Hurry up, you polite old pirate. R. C."

Greatly relieved by this hospitable and characteristic note, Lloyd followed the messenger to the elevator, and from it to the room, where he found Randolph propped up in bed. He was a short, wiry

man, with a solid square head, covered thinly with reddish-brown hair, the keenest gray eyes, and a tight-shut, waggish mouth. A nurse bowed to the visitor. She inquired whether the patient needed anything, and, being informed that he did not, retired to the adjoining room.

"What's the trouble?" Lloyd asked.

"Too much respectable living and a little corner in ptomaines that I scooped the last night on shipboard. No more ship lobster in mine, thank you. While I think of it, there's some Scotch and ice-water on the window there. Be generous. I can't touch it. They thought I had typhoid at first, and Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken were scared almost into collapse.

"Say, old man, what do you think of a sane, inexperienced man of thirty-five chartering two young married women across the Atlantic? I wouldn't do it again for a bunch of gilt-edged bonds and a loving-cup thrown in. Billy, Evelyn's husband, is coming over in a few weeks. Mrs. Aiken is expecting her Alonzo every minute, by the way she talks. It's hotter

than clam broth everywhere at home, seashore and inland, so the girls took it into their heads to come together, as long as little me was booked for that steamer." His voice rose in comic falsetto. "You wouldn't think to look at me that I could be so easy. As soon as I can hop, we're going down to Trouville. They—but, say, I oughtn't to talk. I'm sick. What have you been up against? And where have you been hiding?"

Lloyd gave him a brief account of his summer, dwelling particularly on the difficulty of writing often from a place where one was utterly out of touch with the world.

"You must have painted about seven miles of pictures down there all this time," Randolph hinted.

"I didn't do as much as I expected, Ranney. I rested a good deal, though."

"You always were a wooden Indian for resting. Come to Trouville now, and work a little, entertaining my charges."

"Where are they?"

"Dinner-party. Mrs. Herbert has taken them somewhere. Say, that woman saved me from typhoid by lifting the girls off my hands just a little."

"Is she in Paris? I thought she was at the seashore."

"She left her mother down by the moaning deep, and came here in answer to a presidential message from Evelyn that my stock was bumping on the bottom. The girls were fluttering about, their faces all smudged with tears, or perspiration, I couldn't tell which. Anyway, I asked Evelyn one day if she didn't think it would be a good thing to swear off *poudre de phiz* in hot weather——"

"What did she say?"

"In a positively brutal tone of disappointment, she answered: 'My dear brother, I don't think you're going to die, after all.' Then she burst into tears and waded out of the room. I doubt whether she would ever have come in again if Mrs. Herbert hadn't brought her. Say, I always knew Mrs. Aiken was pretty, and everybody says Evelyn has looks; but

for a bunch of sheer peachiness, Margery Herbert stampedes any assemblage of form, color, youth, and the rest of it that I ever knew. And I have known some."

"Why, you've known her as long as I have, Ranney," Lloyd laughed. "Got any fever?" He reached out as if to touch his hand. "Whence this awakening?"

"Oh, yes, I've known her. I've known lots of 'em and they have always grinned whenever I looked appreciative, while you—oh, well, you're such a naturally damned romantic 'just-look-and-love-me' kind of idol, they fall like pennies in a slot. You ought to be in a uniform, really, old man. Seeing me sick, I guess Mrs. Herbert was too kind to laugh, so, instead, she purled prettily about the nice time we'd have at the seashore, of my marvelous physique—you know I only weigh a hundred and thirty-six at my best—and so on until, well, for the first time in my life I begin to feel I am a marvelous physique—if it's a good thing to be one."

"You're rather glad, then, you selected lobster *à la ptomaine?*" Lloyd suggested.

"Took the words out of my mouth, and you never could do that if I wasn't down," Randolph chuckled.

"Perhaps I'm making you talk too much?"

"I hope you are. Say, what's the matter with her mother?"

"Mrs. Herbert's?"

"Yes. Seems to have contracted the health-resort habit, doesn't she?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Lloyd confessed. "Whenever I've met her mother, Mrs. Herbert has cautioned me not to speak of anything concerning health or sickness."

"Then you can't even say to her: 'How are you?' "

"I think she s a *malade imaginaire.*"

"Frightful disease, I'm sure, whatever it is. Take some ice-water, at least, old man, and you'll talk clearer. What I'd like to know above all is how the deuce you stood it alone down in that Château Hole-in-the-wall of yours?"

"Oh, there was plenty of novelty there," Lloyd returned, as he filled his glass.

"Talking of novelty—wait till you've sat in my game. If you'll come, I'll promise to pull myself together, and we'll get away to-morrow. I'm sick of this cell; and that nurse is the best-hearted, slowest bundle of clothes alive. She makes me feel all the time as though I was just missing a train."

"You're no man to be sick, Ranney. You don't appreciate the unusualness of your situation."

"Don't I? But I've got to stop talking, or she'll be in here to take my temperature. Say you'll come to Trouville, old chap. I'll do as much for you some day. Say you'll get interested in Mrs. Aiken's Alonzo; that you'll watch the steamers arriving every day on this side the earth, from Liverpool to Gibraltar."

"Why, of course I'll go, if you want me."

"If I want you? Do you think I'd ask you to have two drinks of that expensive ice-water if I were not plotting

to win you? You can stand it. You look healthy and strong as a sailor. Besides, it won't be for long—I hope. Of course, you're coming. Have a cigar?. You'll find some I got at the club in the bottom drawer there. Let me smell smoke. I'm sick of medicine."

"Thanks, I won't wait to smoke to-night. I have to go to my hotel to make sure of a room. You see, I came here straight from the station. I was anxious."

"It's awful nice of you, Lloyd. And I sha'n't keep you another minute. Furthermore, my low-pressure nurse will be in here soon to get little Ranney ready for the night. Gee, but I feel ridiculous!"

"I'll be around about ten in the morning," said Lloyd, grasping his hand.

"Don't forget. Thanks. Good-night. Will you knock there and summon the worthy female before you vanish? I pine for her." Randolph gave a merry rattle of a laugh, and, shaking his fingers baby-fashion, as Lloyd went out, cried in falsetto : "Day-day, little one!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### CONCERNING ZOË

When Lloyd returned to the Hotel Ulysse late the next morning, he learned that the doctor had said Randolph must wait a few days longer before undertaking the exertion of the journey to Trouville. The patient submitted reluctantly. His sister was not averse to the postponement, because she had ordered some gowns, without which the watering-place would be a desert strand. Mrs. Aiken, expectant of Alonzo, cared not where she waited, as long as she was not out of reach of a cable message.

Of Margery Herbert, Lloyd had only a momentary glimpse as she was running for a cab that awaited her outside the hotel as he entered. She asked him why he had not written, and he inquired whether

she still intended to motor from Cabourg to see him at his Château d'Exil. With her best smile, she answered: "Of course." It was a most unsatisfactory meeting.

In order to add to Randolph's ease of mind, Lloyd gave Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken a tourney of the galleries, concerts, theaters, and of general exploration in fascinating parts of Paris they hardly knew by name. Then he startled them all by the announcement that he was going back to Vassilly to get his trunks. They urged him to leave the packing and shipping of the trunks to the people who kept house for him.

"I need only certain things," he said, "and no one can get them for me. You see, I got away about half an hour after the telegram reached me, so I'm not very well provided. You good people go on to Trouville as soon as you can, and I'll follow you, direct from my place. Let me know when you start. There won't be any need of me returning to Paris."

So it was arranged; and Lloyd, having advised Mère Lafosse, saw Fernand

staring in wooden dignity, as he stepped out of the train at Falaise.

It was almost dark when the cart rolled, with a grinding roar, under the archway. Mère Lafosse, Bisco, and the soldiers of the republic welcomed him heartily. The old woman counseled him to make haste to supper, which was ready. He must be very hungry.

Entering the house, he looked back and asked, "Where's Zoë?"

"She's gone away," said Mère Lafosse, following him, and giving a glance to the others, as if to say: "Leave it to me."

A while later at table he informed Mère Lafosse that he had come back to get one of his trunks; that he was going to the seashore with his friend who had been ill.

"But you will be here again after the visit to the sea, monsieur?" she asked with concern.

"I can't say how soon, but I'll leave my things as they are."

"If monsieur will permit me to propose it, why not bring the friend here,

too? A few drinks of Norman cider will prolong his life. After all, the sea is only a lot of water. I've never seen it, but Bisco has. He didn't care for it much. It looked so much the same. I'll have a girl from Falaise to-morrow to take Zoë's place."

"Why did Zoë go? Did she want more money?"

"I must tell you that, monsieur. Permit me—the rheumatism warns me, rain is near." Mère Lafosse sought a chair.

"Take the big one," he suggested, lighting a cigarette. "It has arms."

"Picture to yourself, monsieur, that on Sunday night—it was late—Bisco and the boys had already gone to bed, when Zoë came downstairs with her candle lighted, so quietly, and she looked so tall, I was frightened for an instant. Her shadow filled the room. I was by the fire, warming some milk; I had a little scratching in here," she tapped her breast. "I thought she was asleep by this time. I looked at her eyes. They were red and swollen. Tears stood on her cheeks. 'Mère La-

fosse,' she said, handing me her purse—I gave it to her at first communion long ago—'here are one hundred and eighty francs. I had two hundred for my dowry. I've been saving them for six years. I don't want them any more. They bring me no luck. I am going to Falaise.' Positively, monsieur, I thought the girl was dreaming. I spoke sharply to her, told her to wake up, to go to bed, to stop her crying. I even asked her to drink the milk I had warmed for the scratching here, you know. Nothing would bring the girl to reason. She wept like a fountain.

"Imagine, *M. l'Américain,* that stupid animal, Jules Lignat, he's a wretch, too, had told her in the morning after mass that he could not marry her with only two hundred francs dowry. He could have a girl in Falaise who had five hundred, and he was going to take her. Well, monsieur, I kissed Zoë—she had to kneel down beside me, she's so tall—and wiped away her tears.

"Poor Zoë, alas, she had no luck from

the beginning. You know such children" —Mère Lafosse nodded her head significantly—"they have no luck. They pay for others. The good God knows why, I suppose. Well, I told her I would keep the dowry for her in future, and maybe that would bring better luck. Then she kissed me again, asked me to pray for her, and went up to her bed. She drank the hot milk, too; but I was so furious at that animal Lignat that I had forgotten why I was making the milk hot." The little black eyes of Mère Lafosse flashed vengeance.

"She was not up in time the next morning, but I did not call her. She needed the sleep. At ten o'clock I went to her room with a plate of soup—and I ask you, monsieur, to picture to yourself my astonishment when I found she wasn't there. Her bed was all made neatly—she was always good at beds—but she lacked the fine touch for the kitchen. And her hat and shawl were gone!

"When the men came in for dinner—they are working near now—I told Bisco,

and he sent Léon to Falaise to see if anybody had seen her. Léon asked everybody —but it is a big place and full of dark corners as a forest. So we told the postman when he came, and he said he would ask at the railway and tell the authorities. We have heard nothing yet. She's so ashamed, you know, monsieur. Twice she was jilted, and because of the dowry. Now *I* think she did not go to Falaise at all, but to one of the places back in the hills. The postman doesn't go there, and we know none of those people."

"Do you think Lignat would marry her if she had five hundred francs?" Lloyd asked, when some moments had elapsed.

"It took her years to save two hundred, monsieur. Lignat would not wait."

The American was silent. Then he said quickly:

"What do you say to this, Mère Lafosse? Tell him I'll give her five hundred francs. Then she'll have seven hundred. The Falaise girl can't beat that."

"Five hundred francs, monsieur!"

Mère Lafosse jumped from her chair in astonishment, unconscious of rheumatic twinges.

"Zoë always worked very hard to please me," he said. "She kept things in perfect condition."

"Monsieur is not joking?"

"Get Zoë and Lignat at your house as soon as you can, and I'll hand the money over in your presence."

"God knows," said Mère Lafosse fervently, "I'll not do it for that miscreant Lignat."

"Nor I, Mère Lafosse. It's for Zoë."

The old woman called down innumerable blessings on his head and thanked him infinitely. Then, lighting a candle and bidding him good-night, she hastened off to impart the great news to Bisco.

The wedding gift was for Zoë, but it was offered because Mme. La Sainte had championed her. In his heart Lloyd knew this; and he would have liked to ask Mère Lafosse about the cheese-maker. It would have been a natural inquiry, yet he had not ventured it.

He had never regretted that he did not write to her, frequently as he had wished he had written. Their whole acquaintance had been in masquerade, he felt. She could hear much from him in mask; but a masquerade at best was a few brief hours' cheating of actuality.

The notion suddenly came to him that he would not go to Bretêche again. He would join the Coopers at once.

## CHAPTER XVII

### NO MORE OF ZOË

THE unheard-of fortune of Zoë, that the American had promised to provide her with a dowry of five hundred francs, became known through Vassilly the next day. The postman carried the news to Falaise. Porcher, the mayor, who was going to pay a visit to a cousin in a village back in the hills, told the story there. Everybody became interested to trace Zoë to her hiding place, feeling sure that whoever discovered her would receive a reward.

For an hour or two Jules Lignat condescendingly entertained some of his cronies at the smithy, with the complete history of his engagement and the rupture. One of the shrewder of them hinted that the broken betrothal and Zoë's departure

was all a subterfuge, to touch the sympathies of the American's heavy wallet. Jules smiled cryptically, tickled with the flattery. He became wroth, however, and bade them go about their business, when another suggested that his luck had had the discretion to put in an appearance before he was married.

At eleven o'clock he locked the smithy, and walked pompously over to the Château de Dorp. He desired to see his benefactor, in order to convey an expression of gratitude, and he had his speech carefully prepared. It comprised not only his thanks, but also the story of his life, and a plain statement of his philosophy of marriage, as a citizen and a prospective father.

Before Lignat reached Dorp the American had gone riding; to the cross-roads, and thence to the left toward Bretêche. But not until after he had considered the matter from seven different points of view.

He had decided to make a neighborly call of farewell. Simple civility required it, and he wished to see her just once more.

The masquerade must end before the signal to unmask; and it would be much better so. He hoped she would understand how she had transformed a charming but dull countryside into a most wonderful, if humorous, setting of comedy and sentiment. Even he would not attempt to express so elusive an impression to her. He was hoping she would understand; and then, Vassilly, adieu!

The mare cantered blithely along the sunlit road. On the little bridges that spanned the wood's winding stream her hoofs struck martial notes; up the hill, then, and down into the valley, to the abode of Mme. La Sainte.

There was no sign of life about the cheese factory. Was everybody in quest of Zoë, or did this happen to be a church holiday?

At the house the high windows and their heavy cream curtains looked sleepy, as they had looked to him before.

This time he had to wait even longer than the first for the maid to answer the bell.

He rang again. He waited a long while. Suddenly he felt that the house seemed dead.

He led his mare down to the stables. Two horses stood meditative, in their stalls, and turned their heads to look at him as he called:

"Hello, there!"

The horses started. Otherwise the place was still as if enchanted.

The absence of any human being awed him.

He stood pondering for a moment, then turned back to the road. The mare pointed her ears toward Vassilly, but, leading her opposite, he walked farther down the valley, in sight of the stream, which from this spot became wider and more deep.

He was keenly disappointed. A sense of irreparable loss chilled his soul. At intervals a startled bird flew across his path, for he had advanced into a wilder and unfrequented part of the wood. The sun, climbing to the meridian, sparkled on the skipping stream and on the dusty

road, through vents between the leaves. Now the road was a mere wagon track, and the stream brawled noisily to the mute attentive trees.

The mare was tugging away from his arm, as if she wanted to drink. A short distance ahead he descried a pool, in the center of a glade. Here he brought her. and, while she lowered her head, he looked across the surface of the water, that rippled in smiles at the sun. On the farther bank stood a great oak, half whose roots at the trunk had been washed into exposure. Suddenly his eyes were fixed on an incongruous bulk, floating in its shadow, as if held by the roots or by weeds.

Some thirty or forty yards back he had noticed a fallen tree stretched across the stream. He tied the bridle-reins to a sapling, retraced his steps to this spot, and picked his way carefully along the slippery bark. On the other side he broke into a leaping run through the undergrowth. At the oak tree he stopped; then groped cautiously to the very edge of the

pool, and, with one hand gripping a stout root of the oak, he leaned out far.

He was looking down at it now. The face was under. Long hair lay in a tangle at the neck. He swung his weight back, gave a vigorous wrench at the root, to make sure of its resistance, let himself out over the water again, reached down, took a clenching hold of the hair, which spread in his fingers, and dragged the leaden burden up to the bank. Catching it under the arms, he lifted it with difficulty quite out of the water, and laid it face upward among the weeds.

Zoë stared at him out of dead eyes. Her face was very white and cold. Even her hands, that had always been so big and red, were white and shrunken. She seemed taller. He laid his ear to her heart, felt for a sign of pulse; but the look of the face, the rigidity of the limbs, had warned him. Her clothes clung to her like bands suggesting gauntly the lines of her enormous frame.

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the chill moisture from his brow.

Then he forced his way back to the tree that bridged the stream. When he was in the saddle he gave the mare spurs and cut her sharply with the crop. She sprang into a gallop.

Soon he saw ahead of him a workman, leading a lame cow. He pulled the mare up short, snorting and trembling, within ten feet of the man.

"Do you work for Mme. La Sainte?"

The yokel stared cautiously, then answered: "Yes, monsieur."

"You know Zoë, who was with Mère Lafosse?" the American went on excitedly.

"She's not there any more," the workman drawled.

"I know that. She's drowned herself below there in the pool."

"Devil's Pool?"

"Call it what you like. I've just dragged the body out."

"I know where it is, monsieur. It's an unlucky place." The man's face was vacant of expression as a disk.

"She's lying on the bank, near a big oak tree, on the far side, you know."

"Quite dead, monsieur?"

"Been dead for—oh, I don't know how long. Dead's enough, or ought to be. Get a litter of some kind, and bring her over to Dorp."

"But I have no one to help me, monsieur."

"Where is everybody round this place? Dead, too?"

"All gone to Falaise, monsieur. Madame is expected to-night or to-morrow. You know——"

"I'll send you help from Dorp."

"They may be back this afternoon," added the cow-man.

"Get the litter ready now. I'll pay you and send help."

"Instantaneously, monsieur." The fellow bowed almost to the ground. His cow began to cavort wildly as the American leaped away in a gallop.

Mère Lafosse heard the news with wide-eyed awe. He loitered about her, fearing an outburst of grief; but she only

continued to look at him, confounded, murmuring:

"That's what she did then? Alas, this place will be full of funerals!"

After a while she remembered that Léon would have to go to Falaise, to tell M. Rossière to come and take care of the body. Then she remembered that the dinner of *M. l'Américain* was ready; and, for the first time quite weak and dependent on him, inquired whether he thought the funeral should be held next day. Her thoughts whirled topsy-turvy.

"The sooner the better, Mère Lafosse," he said. "We can't do any more for her."

"To die like that, monsieur!" Mère Lafosse moaned, wringing her hands. "It is terrible. They will put her in the far corner of the churchyard, where the ground is not blessed, under the yew tree, monsieur."

"I wouldn't let that distress me, Mère Lafosse," he said feelingly. "Zoë was a good girl. What matters it where they put her?"

"But, monsieur, no mass, no prayers." She gripped her hands in anguish. "To be laid like an animal in that barren spot, where no one ever goes to mutter a Pater and Ave." At last tears tumbled down the old mother's shriveled cheeks.

"Mère Lafosse," said he, laying his hand gently on her stooped shoulder, "believe me, it's not worth worrying about. The good God made all the soil, didn't he —even that which is unblessed?"

She looked up surprised, and wiped her eyes with her apron. "After all, he did make it all, didn't he? Still——"

"And I'll tell you what we'll do, Mère Lafosse. We'll take Zoë's dowry—the five hundred, I mean—and we'll buy a stone to put on her grave. What do you say?"

"Are you going to give her the five hundred francs now, monsieur?" Mère Lafosse asked, amazed.

"Why, of course!"

"And that miscreant Lignat won't get a sou of it?"

"Why should he?"

"God be thanked for that, at least. Poor Zoë!" the woman's head wagged pitifully; "she never had any luck."

*"Elle n'avait pas de chance,"* he repeated. "You have spoken her epitaph, Mère Lafosse."

The old mother's eyes swam again in tears, and she went into the house, saying she would bring dinner to monsieur immediately. As he was about to go over to his own door, Jules Lignat came hurriedly under the archway into the court.

*"Bon jour, monsieur,"* he said cheerfully.

"How are you, Lignat?" There was just a shade of coolness in the tone.

"I have come, monsieur, to express to you my gratitude——"

"It's too late, Lignat," the American interrupted. "Zoë's dead. She threw herself in that pool in the valley of Bretêche. They're bringing her body here——"

"She threw herself in Devil's Pool? She's dead, monsieur?"

"Quite dead, Lignat."

The blacksmith gasped, and breathed a hard, short puff of breath.

"Poor girl!" he said; "she doesn't know what a fool she was to do a thing like that, with five hundred francs coming to her."

He was dumb for a moment, then bowed stiffly and, with a word of farewell, strode down the archway.

When the sun was drowsing in the west the following afternoon they buried Zoë in the far corner of the churchyard, under the yew tree. Birds that had nested in this unfrequented retreat fluttered about, fretful at the intrusion of the crowd; for everybody in Vassilly, and many from Bretêche, walked behind the coffin, from Dorp down the white road that had so often echoed to Zoë's martial tread.

M. le Curé, wearing his soutane, as usual, but with neither stole, surplice nor other insignia of office, met the cortège at the grave and knelt among his people, leading them in Paters and Aves, while Bisco and his four sons laid the torn earth softly on the long, white box.

Near Mère Lafosse, *M. l'Américain* knelt on one knee, wondering, amid the murmuring group of bonneted women, and men with heads uncovered, at this last scene in the tragedy of a woman's heart.

At the outer edge of the circle, unregarded and stolidly observant, stood Lignat.

Soon the people got up clumsily; the men retrieved the handkerchiefs on which they had been kneeling; the women blew their noses and wiped their eyes, and all moved away from the shadow of death, talking and thinking of workaday hopes and cares.

The morning of the Sunday he went to church came back vividly to Lloyd. Now, Zoë was dead, Mme. La Sainte gone away. She would come back, of course. Yet, somehow, the spell of Vassilly seemed broken. He found himself standing near the curé and the mayor.

An acolyte came running to the priest, to whom he gave a surplice and a black stole. The priest put them on, and walked

down the hillside near the church, where a grave was newly opened.

Suddenly Lloyd noticed that the people of Vassilly were not going home, but standing reverentially to allow a second cortège to enter the churchyard.

Men and women, walking slowly in pairs, grouped themselves about the new grave. Perforce, Lloyd remained, imperceptibly stepping back. To leave the place, he felt, would be a plain discourtesy.

The coffin, all boxed in highly polished oak, bore one wreath of lilies. It was carried by four sturdy yeomen. Behind them walked three men in black, and two women, indistinguishable in long veils.

All eyes were fixed on the coffin as the men lowered it into the grave. The priest said the prayers in his loud, clear voice. The people mumbled their responses in varying keys, from youth to age.

The first spadeful of earth was cast by the priest. One of the men in black then took the spade, dug it into the pile of earth, and offered it to the taller of the two women in mourning.

She reached out her gloved hands to take it, swayed slightly, and fell into the arms of the man nearest her.

The other woman moaned and, leaning over, threw up her companion's veil to give her air.

Her eyes were closed, her lips parted, her face pallid as marble.

Lloyd Avery shuddered.

It was Mme. La Sainte.

Without knowing what he thought, or should do, he turned sharply, stole behind the church, and walked away wildly, he knew not whither.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ADIEU, VASSILLY

Dusk was darkening into night when the American came wearily under the archway of Dorp. Mère Lafosse had been keeping watch, and followed him into his rooms with supper.

"Here's a letter for you, monsieur," she said.

He looked into her dim old eyes, that he had seen flash in laughter so often. They were swollen and red with weeping.

"I must go away to-morrow," he returned gloomily.

"I understand, monsieur. This is a sad place for a holiday."

"It's not so much that, Mère Lafosse. But, you remember, I came down here only to get my things. I've made engagements."

"After all, apart from Zoë, I have not so much regret, monsieur. You know, the husband of Mme. La Sainte—well, he was an unfortunate character. Handsome animal and all that, and a family so old they have been burying them in the churchyard there ever since the church was built —and that was not two years ago, as you can see. But——"

The American was silent for a moment. He pretended to be interested in his supper.

"Perhaps, Mère Lafosse," he began hesitantly, "it will be better for me to give you the check for the stone on Zoë's grave now."

"Aren't you coming back?" Mère Lafosse was astounded.

"Oh, yes, probably I shall; but it's better to have the work done at once."

Mère Lafosse began to weep silently.

"You'll have to excuse me to-night, monsieur. To-morrow——"

She hobbled away, sobbing: "I'm all upset."

He got up and opened the door for her, saying:

"Good-night. Thank you, Mère Lafosse."

He sipped a little of his wine, but had no wish to eat. He opened the letter, which was from Randolph Cooper. He did not attempt to read it.

He was thinking the same thoughts that had whirled through his brain while he wandered in the fields. He had no idea where he had walked, save that he walked as a man in a dream.

Often he had seen death, death in his own family; and he had found Zoë dead only the day before. He had seen that highly polished oak box carried on the shoulders of the four stout yeomen, and seen to admire the dignity and simplicity of the procession. A funeral was always a pageant, solemn, pathetic, or grotesque. But when the veil had been thrown up from her face, somehow, he knew not how, for the first time in his long, observing years, he realized death.

The masquerade between him and Mme. La Sainte was at an end.

Had she seen him through her veil? He did not know; and it mattered little. He only wished he might have escaped seeing her as he saw her then.

In all this child's play of life, with its sham, its seductions, its multifarious combination of make-believe, comes irresistibly the dark summons to unmask.

He sat up very late, musing aimlessly amid the stillness and the strange noises of the country summer night.

To-morrow would see him leaving Vassilly for the last time. He wanted to see her, but now was not the moment. He would write to her after a while.

Besides, he was sure that Randolph's letter embodied a reproach that he had lingered so long here.

He waited until the next morning to read it.

"Have you no honor in promises given," Randolph wrote without superscription, "reformer and mugwump that you are?

Or is a girl winning you away from me? You of the immature gray hair! Remember I have two girls on my hands, and be kind.

"We are at Trouville. Also, Alonzo skates not hither, and I am tired of watching the ocean choo-choos from Liverpool to Gibraltar.

"Have pity on me, and have it quick! The hotel that gives away this measly paper—no trading-stamps—sends a 'bus to meet every train. Chase one!"

Lloyd answered Randolph's cry for help with a telegram. He packed his trunks, and the same afternoon left Falaise for Trouville, a journey of a few hours.

It was two weeks later. The dining-room of the hotel at Trouville, which had been recommended to Randolph's sister in a letter from Mrs. Herbert, looked toward the sea. On this sultry evening a grateful breeze bore the muffled roar of the waves through the wide windows with ceaseless iteration.

Lloyd had been telling them about Zoë, one of his many recitals as the holder of the château. He had never mentioned Mme. La Sainte.

Both Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken were perceptibly moved. In a while Randolph said in his way of humorous summary:

"A homely girl without money has no more chance than a handsome man. Consider me." He winked his shrewd gray eyes, turned toward Lloyd, and continued: "Consider our château acquaintance. Note the distinguished gray symbols of sin and error, miscalled experience, that faintly silver his temples. Observe, a perfect nose, though plain, gives balance to a well-stenciled face. The nobility of the brow and the firmness of the jaw, too cushioned in well-fedness, perhaps, are evident to the most casual eye. See his nostrils quiver, the sign of mettle—no—excuse me, the sign of laughter. Sir, explain yourself—what's the joke? . . . Girls, tell me, why do Lloyd and I remain unloved, unsought? You both know what a faithful, kind, attentive soul I am.

What is it, Mrs. Aiken, that a woman of your discriminating vision sees in Alonzo that she can't see in me?"

Mrs. Aiken's very fair hair was manipulated in the latest Parisian arabesque, that relieved her doll-like face from its usual expression of pictured innocence and wonder. Her gown was of a white, limp, delicate weave, with a half-hidden design of bluets, that emulated the shade of her eyes. She brought whipped cream to one's mind.

"Why, all I can say," she answered with dimpling cheeks, "is that some girls are not lucky."

"You must never tell that to Alonzo," Evelyn interposed. "I have been married three years and know."

"But you didn't know till after you had spoiled Billy irremediably," said Lloyd. "I appeal to your wise brother. Wasn't Billy insufferably happy and content after marrying Evelyn?"

"He had reason to be," cried Mrs. Aiken.

"All men," said Randolph, "are that way when they get the girl—the right one. Now that I think of it, Lloyd, that's one of the reasons—of course, there are others—why I have never married. I hate the thought of falling in your esteem."

"If Ranney is going to tell us all he doesn't know about marriage," said Evelyn, laughing, "I propose that we go and hear a band, or something, by way of accompaniment."

"Let's go to a vaudeville show, if there's one here," Mrs. Aiken proposed vivaciously.

Randolph scrutinized her in comic severity, and said, as if only to the others: "What would Alonzo say if he heard her now?"

"He would say I was all right," Mrs. Aiken retorted. "He wants me to have a good time while I'm away, and I'm going to tell him everything I've done."

"And, of course, he'll tell you everything he's done, the dear." Randolph smiled. "Don't look that way at me. I

mean it. But before we start I have a little surprise for you all."

They leaned toward him, curious.

"Of course," he began sadly, "even though neither of you say so, or even look it, you're so good, I feel you must be a little—only a little—tired of me."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Aiken cried; "why, Randolph, how can you——"

"Dear Mrs. Aiken, don't Randolph me in that tone of voice, or I'll tell Alonzo. So I venture to hint that to-morrow you take Lloyd with you to visit that monastery, or convent, or whatever it is."

"Why don't you both come?" Evelyn suggested.

"Two men for one man's work?" Randolph asked in surprise. "A man can only go as far as the gate, mother, anyway. Besides, as soon as I knew Lloyd was coming I made an engagement to play golf to-morrow afternoon with Victor de Fesnières."

"I don't know," said Evelyn, "but that I would as soon play golf myself. I'm

not so keen to see the inside of a convent."

"Evelyn, dear," Mrs. Aiken protested, "you must not change your mind now. You'll never have another chance like this, and I am frank to say I'm just crazy to go. Besides, I'm sure I almost asked Mme. de Fesnières that night in Paris to let us visit her there."

"I shall be very glad to go, even if it's only as far as the gate, mesdames," said Lloyd. "And if I were in your place, I would not let Randolph go now, even if he cried."

"Still, you know, Lloyd, such places are always much less mysterious than——"

Evelyn was silent before the interruption of a boy, who came up abruptly.

*"Message pour Mme. Aikenne,"* he announced.

"It's a cablegram," Mrs. Aiken cried, snapping up the envelope and tearing it open nervously.

"The lost will, thank God!" Randolph

droned in melodramatic accents. "The old farm is saved!"

Mrs. Aiken gave a little, hysterical laugh as her dancing eyes sped over the few words of the message. Then she read aloud:

" 'Sailing to-day. Billy. Alonzo.' Isn't that delicious?" she added.

"Henceforward, Randolph Cooper," said his sister laughingly, "you can wander whithersoever it pleases you."

"That's what you call gratitude, old man," Randolph groaned to his friend, and wiped away a supposititious tear.

"Well, we're going to see the show, just the same, aren't we?" Lloyd asked.

As they were leaving the dining-room, Randolph whispered to him: "If I had known Alonzo was waiting till you got here, to send that cable, I'd never have allowed you to get away from me at all."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CONVENT

LUNCHEON over, Lloyd purposed to fill the interval before they set out for the convent in writing a letter too long postponed. He knew that morning in Paris, when he saw Mrs. Herbert as she was hurrying to the train, that he would have difficulty in acquitting himself of the easy promise to write and tell her about himself. In the first days at Dorp he had been equal to the demand. Now—the thought came as an inspiration: he would write to her about Zoë.

He told her the episode, omitting only reference to his futile intervention at the eleventh hour. The lowly tale of ill-starred love would interest her, he was convinced, because she was absorbedly attentive to anything printed or written on

the theme; and this had actually happened. He had to confess failure, however, when he re-read the letter as a personal expression. There was next to nothing of himself in it; yet he could write no other.

He was addressing the sealed envelope wearily, when a servant came to say that Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Aiken were waiting.

It was a long, tedious drive to the convent, in a lumbering carriage, that creaked uphill, and rolled like a boat going down. Mrs. Aiken talked most of the time, and he said to himself that he knew now why Randolph had got tired of her. She talked more than he talked. That was offense enough to one of Randolph's monologue habit. Still, her loquacity to-day was not entirely without warrant. Alonzo was on the water, she was counting the hours; and she was about to penetrate the mysteries of a convent. Evelyn herself was stimulated by this promise of discovery.

"I wonder whether they'll let us see everything?" she questioned.

"To be sure they will," Mrs. Aiken asserted. "Aren't we women just as they are? Oh, I'm so glad I'm a woman today. This is one of the times when we have the advantage of you, Mr. Avery."

"I can go see monks somewhere," he retorted, smiling. "The kind that make things to drink. You can't."

"You never would, though," Evelyn interposed.

"Why do women like Mme. de Fesnières go to these places, anyway?" he asked. "They stay for a week or more, too, don't they?"

"Mme. de Fesnières told me," said Mrs. Aiken, "that she would remain this time for ten days. They have prayers and sermons and things; and they don't speak a word for three hours every day."

"Do you believe any woman can keep silence that long?" Lloyd queried.

"Why, to be sure they can," Mrs. Aiken replied seriously. "I remember one day, when I was alone in the——"

"Oh, that's different," he interposed.

"It's a splendid scheme to be rested," said Evelyn. "You are absolutely free from cares, social or domestic."

"Unless some Americans chance across your trail," said Lloyd.

"Lloyd," Evelyn spoke in mock reproof, "if you are sorry you came with us on this pious visit, you can get down right here and walk back to Randolph and Mr. de Fesnières."

"Listen," Mrs. Aiken interrupted, lowering her voice, "I'll tell you something about him."

"You can't tell me anything about my brother," said Evelyn, laughing.

"Margery Herbert told me, in strictest confidence," Mrs. Aiken went on, "the last night she was in Paris, that Victor de Fesnières was madly in love with a certain woman. His mother had marriage in view for him with an entirely different person. Victor insisted on marrying the other woman, till one day, when he and his mother were discussing it, Mme. de Fesnières fell in a deadly swoon. She has a weak heart, you know. They had a hard

time to restore her, and she was under medical attendance for two weeks, I think. So Victor, to save his mother's life, Margery says, gave up the other woman—who, Margery says, is not at all the kind of woman he ought to marry. Though she's very nice and all that."

"Does Margery know the other woman?" asked Evelyn.

"And now," Lloyd interjected, "Victor, like a good boy, will marry the woman *maman* appointed to him, and they will probably both be rather miserable."

"The very thing I said to Margery!" Mrs. Aiken exclaimed. "But it seems that the other woman—I mean the woman he ought to marry—she's not the other woman, you know——"

The carriage stopped. They had reached the convent, standing like a royal residence in the midst of a spacious park, and looking away to the distant sea.

Lloyd got down and aided them to alight. Beside them he walked past the tall gates and up the stone stair of the entrance.

The coachman followed them with surprised eyes that might have said: "An American will do anything."

Lloyd rang the bell, that tinkled somewhere remote. They went into the vestibule, both women in a flutter of expectation. Soon a small panel of the inner door was lifted, and behind a wire screen appeared the face of a nun.

"I'll wait outside," Lloyd said quickly, and retreated.

He stood at the foot of the steps, glancing about the well-kept park; looked at his watch. They would not be back for fifteen or twenty minutes at the earliest. His eyes fell upon the coachman. No, he was tired of sitting in the carriage. He would walk in the park. There could be no harm in that.

As the coachman saw him disappear, he uttered the thought he had only looked before: "An American will do anything. *C'est épatant!*"

Lloyd followed the pebbled pathway, marked with a little sign at the edge of the lawn, "Avenue de la Sainte Trinité."

At intervals side-paths diverged from the main artery, each bearing a religious name. Here and there, through the trees, his eye caught a glimpse of the colored statue of a saint; and far down the avenue in which he walked was a towering cross, bearing a figure of the Crucified, shining in the glory of the sun. The lawns, the paths, the flower-beds were immaculately fresh and clean.

His way took him abruptly to the left, between hedges of scrupulously trimmed boxwood, when he found himself before a stone grotto that framed a statue of the Virgin. A woman, all in black, though not the habit of a nun, had been kneeling there. He stopped, stepped back, and was about to retire, as she rose, making the sign of the cross. He drew aside to allow her to pass. Her eyes were quite closed. In her hands she held a rosary.

"Mme. La Sainte!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

She gave a terrified start, stood still, and gazed at him in dismay. Her lips moved as if she would have spoken, but no sound

issued. Pallor overspread her face, and her eyes burned feverishly. She swayed as if about to fall. He sprang forward to her aid; but she waved him off and leaned heavily against the hedge, quivering in every nerve. Her eyelids drooped and her lips were parted. She seemed to him a transfigured being, palpitant with the ecstasy of the spheres, a prisoner to earth. Her head lay to the side, and on her neck a stray tendril of her dark mass of hair stirred to the whisper of the breeze. He remembered her ears, not too small, delicately hollowed, and lying close to her head.

"Did I not tell you," he said softly, "that this is a world of dreams? Phantom-like we meet once more. . . . I wonder have you ever wished that we should? . . . I wonder do you know how that wish has been gnawing at my heart since the dreadful day when death tore off the mask? Can you have guessed that the great dream of my life has come true? You are the lure of the far-away!"

He reached to take her hand. She

avoided him and moved away. He stepped quickly in front of her.

"Won't you even speak to me?"

She laid her finger against her lips and looked at him out of saddened eyes.

He smiled gravely and added: "After all, you know, you don't really need to speak—to me. A look from those eyes I think of always, a touch of the little hand, to have kissed which has made the whole world seem new. Between you and me words are the clumsiest of messengers."

She smiled sadly, bowed with unconscious grace, and was going.

He laid his hand gently on her wrist. "You must not leave me like this. I understand, I think, why you cannot speak to-day. I try to understand everything because I care. But"—he pulled his wallet out nervously, plucked a card from it, and said in a trembling voice—"please take it. I'm in Trouville, at the Hôtel de la Terrasse. You must know my name. We are both in our own world again, and

the masquerade is over. Send me one line so I may find you soon, will you, please?"

The shadowed eyes of amethyst were raised to his pleading face. She held out her hand.

"Adieu!" she murmured falteringly.

"Won't you take the card?" he entreated.

Her head swayed in negative. She smiled again sadly.

He brought her hand to his lips. A strange dread flashed through his mind. Still clasping her hand, he leaned toward her and asked hoarsely:

"Tell me, you have not come here to stay—always?"

She started nervously and listened.

They heard brisk footsteps on the Avenue de la Sainte Trinité.

Pulling her hand free, she ran back to the grotto, then through a break in the hedge, and he saw her no more.

The footsteps were quite near. He walked out to the little avenue, and found himself face to face with a stout old man, who wore a long rubber apron and car-

ried garden-shears. The stout old man was greatly discomposed.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said sharply, "but did monsieur come with two ladies?"

"Yes. Are they waiting?"

"Since some time, monsieur. I have been searching. They are alarmed, monsieur."

"I'll go to them," said the American, walking away rapidly.

In a wobbling run the stout old man overtook him.

"Pardon again, monsieur," he puffed, "but it is very much against the rules that anybody should go through the park without special permission."

"I haven't been through yet," said Lloyd, smiling at the wagging, authoritative head.

"Perfectly, monsieur; but even part of the way——"

"See here," the American asked boldly, "what's your name?"

"My name?" was the echoed answer, and the man's face was big with mystery,

"my name is Adam, and I am the gardener here, monsieur."

"Well, Adam, I haven't got time to go through the park now, much as I'd like to. You say yourself, my friends are waiting. But you take this as an expression of my appreciation of your offer."

The gardener studied the yellow ten-franc piece in the palm of his brown hand, and then studied the features of his benefactor.

"At any time, monsieur," he murmured obsequiously, and tried to bow, "I am at the service of monsieur and his friends."

Lloyd hurried back to the gates.

"Were you lost?" Mrs. Aiken asked, as he sprang into the carriage.

"I might have been if the gardener hadn't appeared," Lloyd answered, "who, I'm sure, is a terrible bore. Of course, he has his use, as he is probably one of the few who know all the twists of that labyrinth."

"You're pale," Evelyn remarked. "I hope you haven't been too much in the sun."

"Oh, I'm all right; just got a little warm in my hurry to find you." He patted his forehead with his handkerchief, and as the carriage turned in the downward road, gave a final glance at the convent tower, surmounted by a cross of gold. "How did you people get along? What kind of a place is it?" he asked.

He listened to them, and yet heard only broken sentences. Her one word, "Adieu!" rang in his mind with undying echo.

Suppose she were to stay there— But that was impossible. And yet— Of course, she was puzzled to know how he chanced to find her there. If he had explained—perhaps the gardener could be of service?

She might not return to the lonely house in the valley for months. Would she ever return? He must get word to her while she was at the convent. But would she be known there as Mme. La Sainte?

He wondered whether she knew his name. Although Mère Lafosse always called him *M. l'Américain,* she knew his

name naturally, and might have told it to Mme. La Sainte. He doubted whether the occasion for Mère Lafosse to do so had ever happened. Had she herself not forbidden him to speak the day he visited her at Bretêche, saying, with a charming peremptory air: "*L'Américain* is your name here. So you will always be known and spoken of, even when you are gone." "As you are Mme. La Sainte!" he had said to her in return; and he remembered that the eyes of amethyst were suddenly hid from him, while the enigmatic smile lurked about her lips. . . .

"I wonder how one of those nuns would look," Mrs. Aiken was chattering volubly, "with the thing off her head? I'd like to see the little one at the door. Wasn't she sweet?"

And all the time Lloyd's thoughts tumbled frantically in his brain. He must get word to her—but how?

He had seen her again. His lips still felt the touch of her hand. The cleansing fire of a supreme passion swept through his veins. He had seen her again.

By what lucky cast of the dice of destiny, he did not pause to guess. How long ago it was that he saw her for the first time in the post-office at Falaise; the Sunday morning, emerging like a fairy princess from the doorway of Mère Lafosse; the interminably enchanting afternoon they sat in the balcony at Bretêche; in the wistful solitude of the moonlit road, when, for an instant, he looked on her soul as through a haze and all the world else was not; the strange encounter in the churchyard when the reticence of Mère Lafosse was suddenly made clear to him, and he saw the shackles struck from her as by lightning.

Each of their meetings had been epochal, and the other days of his life were null. For her he had lived through years of weariness and question. His old self fell from him like a garment. Life was born in him again, and she was his life.

How tremulous her hand had been in the convent garden, and how cold! Her cheeks had flamed, and the light in her eyes had become dim at the shock of see-

ing him. What had he said to her? He could not recall. He knew only he must devise a way to see her again. He must learn whether she purposed to remain always in the convent. . . . Why should she not have gone there as Mme. de Fesnières went, merely for a period of seclusion and repose?

Again the gardener, Adam, of symbolic name, came to his mind, as his sole means of salvation. But what if she should vanish from the convent, as she had vanished from Bretêche?

Suddenly there was a halt in Mrs. Aiken's brooklike babble, and Lloyd realized that they were back at the hotel. He jumped out of the carriage with the nervous haste of a man waking late, and assisted Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken to alight. Then, as he was giving the driver his *pourboire,* amid little cries of surprise from them, he heard the low, round tones of a voice unrecognized, yet familiar.

Looking up, he saw Mrs. Herbert on the veranda. She wore a very smart, very simple dress and hat, and there was some-

thing in her carriage and in her glance that made her seem five years younger than was her due. Her eyes were so very blue, and her handsome teeth flashed as she smiled.

Beside her, his shrewd, humorous face a mask of comic solemnity, stood Randolph Cooper. Lloyd fancied that he must have played raggedly to look so glum after three hours of his favorite pastime. The truth was, however, that Randolph had not been golfing at all. He had been playing a new game.

## CHAPTER XX

### MRS. HERBERT CLAIRVOYANTE

"Hello, Lloyd," Mrs. Herbert greeted him cheerily, "you did not write, so I came over to see you."

She laughed at her audacity, and the other women chimed with her.

"I wrote you a letter just before we went out," said Lloyd, "but forgot to mail it."

Now he laughed, and, drawing the letter from his pocket, offered it to her.

"Eleanor de Guerville is coming to visit mother and me at Cabourg this day week," said Mrs. Herbert, accepting the letter without notice, "and I've run over to insist that you all be there to meet her at luncheon. That adventurous husband of hers and the two boys are on a yachting trip, which will terminate at Cabourg

nobody knows when. Meanwhile, Eleanor will console herself with my poor company, and I want you to help me out."

"Is it going to be an awfully good luncheon?" Mrs. Aiken asked.

"Stunning!" cried Mrs. Herbert. "The *maître d'hôtel* and I spend hours most diligently in planning it. He has promised to mix us a salad himself—and if you ever saw him you would know what a deep personal interest that indicates."

"We must see him, in that case," said Evelyn, "whether we go to the luncheon or not."

Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken walked with Randolph along the veranda to the main door. Mrs. Herbert lingered a few steps behind them, and adroitly returned the sealed letter to Lloyd.

"It's too late now," she said knowingly. "I want you to tell me all about it. A letter's too incomplete—at least, yours are."

"Tell you about what?" Lloyd inquired in mild amazement.

Evelyn was waiting for them in the

open doorway. Mrs. Herbert smiled at her, made a semblance of hurrying, then murmured aside to Lloyd:

"About the girl you fell in love with, down there in Vassilly."

It was nearly half an hour later, when they were all taking tea, before Lloyd had a chance to say to Mrs. Herbert:

"Who gave you the idea that I fell in love with a girl down in Vassilly?"

"The whole countryside is buzzing with the story," she replied in her excited, exaggerated way.

"Have you been to Vassilly?" he asked.

"I motored over there with friends the day after you had left. I saw your Château d'Exil and Mère Lafosse, who was awfully sorry you had gone. What a dear old woman she is! And honestly, now, Lloyd, you who have always made fun of my judgment, wasn't I right when I said you'd fall in love down there?"

"My dear Margery, you are always expecting people to fall in love anywhere."

She flushed, and the brilliant blue eyes grew hard.

"Why shouldn't you?" he added, smiling. "Men have always fallen in love with you everywhere."

"I'd like to get angry with you," she returned. "You're the most evasively irritating man I've ever known. And most men are irritating, and I've known many, don't you think?"

"You will get angry with me some day, I suppose." He laughed as he spoke.

Her fine nostrils suddenly tightened. Her lower lip trembled attractively; but the paleness that overspread the rose-glow of her cheeks alarmed him.

"I'm sorry," he murmured apologetically; "my joke was crude, I fear. You're angry now."

Margery inclined her head in affirmation. She glanced across the room at Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken, to make sure they were engrossed in .their own talk. Then she murmured ominously:

"We can't talk here. Let me say only this—I don't think you're quite frank,

Lloyd. One ought to be frank with one's real friends."

It was his turn to set his jaw. "Please, Margery, don't talk in maxims. What are you driving at?"

"You know perfectly well."

"A woman always says that when she knows a man can't possibly know what she means."

She laughed. "What a spat we're having, and in such a quiet, well-bred way." Her voice grew artificial. "Don't you think this is a good hotel?"

"Margery," he murmured, "you are the most incorrigibly romantic woman that ever lived. As you say, one can't talk here. May I see you before you go for your train?"

"Why?" She smiled weariedly.

"May I?"

"So you may tell me more of my faults?"

"May I?" he repeated.

She rose without giving him an answer, and, with a pretense of laughing, called across the room, in her most happy voice:

"Evelyn, I must have another cup of tea. Lloyd has just paid me a compliment."

"You must have really deserved it," chirped Mrs. Aiken. "He didn't even criticize us on the way back from the convent. Randolph can at least find something sharp to say, no matter how bored he is."

"The only way I can keep Mrs. Aiken and my sister from running me down," cried Randolph, suddenly appearing between the palms that screened the doorway, "is to stay with them. Even that method has been known to fail."

They all looked up in surprise at the sound of his voice, and saw not only Randolph, but beside him Victor de Fesnières.

"Great tea we are having, isn't it?" Randolph went on, regardless of the greetings being exchanged between Victor and the women. "I like tea in France because they make it worth while. Evelyn, some bay-rum in mine, please. Thanks, no; no sugar, no shampoo, no face massage—only tea to-day. And now, girls," seating him-

self between his sister and Mrs. Aiken, "tell me all about the convent. Isn't it a perfectly wonderful place?"

"They don't talk very much there," said his sister.

"I knew you people would find some fault with it," said Randolph, who sipped his tea with a melancholy air, and, contrary to his habit, stopped talking.

Lloyd imagined that Randolph's gaiety was not his natural effervescence. It seemed forced; and, remembering how solemn he had looked, standing beside Margery Herbert a little while before, he questioned within himself whether it was merely bad golf that had spoiled his humor. He was so interested, however, in the unexpected appearance of Victor that he had little room in his mind for surmises about Randolph.

He was prepared to note Victor's meeting with Margery, wondering, meanwhile, whether they had met since the night he found himself in the mock-heroic emergency of frustrating the attempted elopement. Victor was handsome in white flannels,

and his black hair, black mustache, and black eyes shone by contrast. His face was tanned, and the skin firm. He looked thoroughly fit; and greeted the woman for whom he had once spent his nights writing fervid sonnets, with a calm, correct, friendly smile. Margery posed maternal, and Lloyd argued to himself whether she was not more dangerous thus to a susceptible young man than when she spread her net more candidly. Victor was plainly not susceptible now; and Lloyd knew that, for all the subtle coquetry of her pose, Margery would not have him otherwise. She yearned to know of his mother's health and of her probable departure from the convent. Victor informed her that his mother had quite regained her health, and that she would leave the convent within a week or ten days. He hoped Mrs. Herbert would not forget that she had promised to spend a few days with them at their villa.

Mrs. Herbert had more dexterity than most women in the knack of segregating a man so that the talk could be intimate. It was not long, consequently, before she

and Victor were comfortable at one table, and the others were a general assemblage some distance away.

"You look very happy, Victor," she said in a slightly lower tone; which was the signal that conditions allowed confidences to begin.

Victor assured her that he was happy: first, because the marriage he hoped he should be able to make seemed his destiny, though at one time such an event lay beyond human probability. And, while it meant the happiest lot in the world for him, it included nearly an equal happiness for his mother. To himself Victor said, as he talked thus, that he felt like an imbecile. Yet what could one do when a woman probed one's feelings with all the delicacy and deliberation of a surgeon? Of course, he had seen very little of his prospective fiancée. Knowing all the facts in the matter, he was sure Mrs. Herbert would understand why he had seen her so rarely. He wrote to her every day, and, while her letters were few, he understood her reticence and felt it was

not necessary to explain to Mrs. Herbert. Margery said sweetly that it was quite unnecessary to explain, gave him all her good wishes, and hoped they both would be happy beyond dreams.

Victor was thoroughly uncomfortable now; and thought with an inward wince that if he had not made such a fool of himself once over Mrs. Herbert, and that if she were not so good a friend of his mother, she never could have got him in such a corner. He could hardly restrain a sigh of relief when she abruptly turned the conversation into an inquiry about Lloyd Avery.

He told her quietly that the first time he had met Mr. Avery here in Trouville was a few minutes ago. To be outspoken, he did not care for Mr. Avery, though he liked Mr. Cooper, Mr. Avery's friend, better than any American he had ever known. Mr. Cooper and Victor, she learned, spent a good deal of time at the club. Cooper was finished at billiards, golf, sailing—at anything, in a word—and the pleasantest of companions, whether winning or losing.

Mr. Avery did not seem to care much for *"le sport"*; and, in consequence, Victor had really had no occasion to meet him. He was a rather depressing person, on the whole, and went about like a man with a hidden sorrow.

When Mrs. Herbert had ascertained so much of Victor's impressions of Lloyd Avery she laughed quite heartily, and somewhat to Victor's surprise.

She laughed only because she saw Lloyd coming across the room. Victor's remark that Lloyd went about like a man with a hidden sorrow rang in her ears with a significance all undreamed of by Victor.

"I've been ordered to break this party up," said Lloyd, "and ask you both to dine here with us."

"I'd love to," Margery beamed as she spoke, "but I must go back to Cabourg. I'll just have time to see the girls for a moment and get ready to go to the train. I'll do the next best thing. I'll ask Victor to stay here and represent me. He says you haven't seen much of each other,

Lloyd; and I think you're both so nice, you ought to be great friends."

Both men recognized instinctively her peace-making intention. Lloyd begged Victor to accept the invitation, if only because Mrs. Herbert had translated it so felicitously. Victor, however, pleaded a previous engagement and added gallantly:

"I'm sure Mr. Avery will understand how difficult it is to refuse any request of Mrs. Herbert, who grows more charming day by day."

Mrs. Herbert doffed the maternal pose, and shed on them both, eyes, teeth, and lips in smiling languor.

"Ah, *la France!*" she sighed lightly. "Here every man is a courtier, or becomes one. Even Randolph is changing, *hélas! Au revoir,* Victor," she said, aiming the brilliant eyes at Lloyd. *"Au revoir,* Lloyd! When you come to luncheon I shall trust to you to bring Victor with you."

"I shall be glad to come with Mr. Avery," Victor replied agreeably, "unless

a certain other engagement should intervene."

"I understand." Mrs. Herbert was maternal again, as she gave him her hand. "Bless you both!"

"I do not deserve her," Victor sighed in French.

Lloyd recalled on the instant Mrs. Aiken's story, as they were riding to the convent, of the woman Victor had given up because his mother's plans and her precarious health demanded it. He knew the woman given up must be Margery Herbert. But who might the woman be that Victor now purposed to marry? Margery had spoken as though the marriage were imminent. Randolph had never said even that Victor was engaged; but Randolph hardly ever spoke of him, except casually.

Lloyd had confessed in the beginning that he was not greatly interested in Victor; and as Victor had spoken similarly of Lloyd, Randolph preserved a diplomatic attitude. His friendship with Lloyd dated from immemorial days, and could suffer no hurt because Victor and he en-

joyed each other's society. Moreover, Victor had showered attentions on him in the most cordial spirit. In fact, Victor had been his only resource before Lloyd came to Trouville. Finally, having no knowledge of the elopement fiasco, Randolph had judged that Lloyd and Victor just chanced to be mutually antipathetic.

As Lloyd saw Margery following Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken out of the room, he said to her:

"I don't believe I have told you how much I appreciate your invitation to luncheon. You see, I needed to have it confirmed after our 'words'; and when you asked me to bring Victor de Fesnières"—he tried to smile easily.

She stopped a moment, saw Randolph and Victor occupied with each other, and murmured satirically:

"Are you a comedian, after all?"

The sentence was hardly uttered when she was gone.

## CHAPTER XXI

### CROSS-EXAMINATIONS

Lloyd's utterance of appreciation in the matter of the luncheon invitation, as Margery was about to go out of the room, was intended by him as preface to a renewed request that he might see her alone before she went back to Cabourg.

Her exaggerated statement that the whole countryside down at Vassilly was buzzing with the story of his love-affair was absurd; and yet, it occurred to him, a perilous notion to be loose in the charming mouth of Margery Herbert. His sole purpose in seeing her alone was to set her right in her narratives about him. He knew so well her clearness in piecing together all the details of an episode, those one heard and those one knew by induction.

Not that Margery would ever tell anything broadcast. She was, on the contrary, reputed to be rather taciturn, except with her intimates, who were few. But Lloyd was aware that conversations with intimates are nearly always confidences, and that the surest way to make a thing known is to make it a secret.

Of his love for Mme. La Sainte he had no reason to be ashamed or hesitant in admission. When they first knew each other she was hardly more real a being to him than he must have seemed to be to her. A lady cheesemaker! The mere suggestion had made him think of the dairy-house in the gardens at Versailles. Only, her masquerade bore a tawdry archaic air to him, a New Yorker of the nineteen hundreds, until he woke one day to the realization that he himself must seem somewhat of a cheap imitation. If he had been really a painter, it would be understandable that he should hoard himself in a country where there was less landscape and more good tillage and pasture than elsewhere. To be merely a dilettante at painting, as at life,

however—Margery's question came back to him:

"Are you a comedian, after all?"

It was a question that might be put by a woman clever with words (and with the shadows they are of ideas), that Margery might put, in her most seductive voice, and never know quite what it meant in her own mind or in the mind of the man addressed. He remembered some of Margery's talks with him about pictures: pictures Italian, Dutch, English, French, Spanish; and he remembered the marvel that she could talk with him so intelligently, and yet with so shallow an understanding. He had never heard Mme. La Sainte talk about pictures; about anything at length, to be exact. Her talent, the highest a woman may have, was to listen. He had read somewhere: "He that listens much, learns much, which is nearly all: he that talks much, tells everything, which is little."

He was willing to admit Margery's ever-lively perspicacity. She was cleverer than nine women in ten; but the tenth

might be so much cleverer than Margery. Suppose the tenth were one who could see as quickly, sharply and deeply as Margery, but said nothing? In other words, who let her judgment mature? Suppose the tenth woman were Mme. La Sainte?

Had she ever said to herself: "Is he a comedian, after all?"

Perhaps he had been a masquerader, he reasoned. If he had, he had observed the code of the masquerade. The day he saw her in the churchyard, however, sounded the signal to unmask; and he had fled away. Her mask had been forced upon her, he knew now; his grew upon him in a holiday diversion. Yet they both had realized and respected the illusion, that it was all as make-believe as the fantastical voices of the peasants, across the perfumed fields, in fairy moonlight:

*Son souvenir m'enorguellit encore*
*Et charmera jusqu'à mon dernier jour!*

After the improbable encounter in the convent garden to-day, had his memory

any charm for her? Did she, too, think him a comedian? The question came back to him annoyingly.

Another inquiry suggested itself. How did Margery Herbert know, imagine, or guess that he had fallen in love down in Vassilly? He knew himself that he had not been really in love with Mme. La Sainte until this afternoon. Her attraction as the lady cheesemaker had been fictional; his whole acquaintance with her a dream awake. To-day, amid all the mystic environment of the garden, she was his to look upon as herself. It was not possible that Margery should know this. She had heard, probably, of his visit to a lady in a château at his summer retreat. To a woman of Margery's super-intuition, the love sequel was inevitable. Inwardly he solemnly cursed her super-intuition as being always in error.

Many of these thoughts were bubbling in Lloyd's mind during the tea; and Margery's parting remark, at once a question and a criticism, had left him quietly enraged.

Randolph and Victor were going to swim, then to dine at the club; and their invitation that Lloyd join them was twice spoken before he heard it. They were about to start.

Lloyd said he had letters to write. He was in arrears with his correspondence and thought he would give up the evening to it.

Randolph and Victor bade him good-evening and went their way. Once outside, Randolph said, smiling sadly:

"My comrade acts like he had a woman on his mind. Maybe I have one on mine, or maybe she's off—I don't know. It's for her to say. When a busy man goes to writing letters, though, as you French say, Victor—*'Chassez la femme.'*"

*"Cherchez,* we say," Victor replied, with a laugh.

"Well, it's a chase, anyway. The great thing for a man to know is when to stop running. Darn it, a man never knows when it's the real girl. Haylast!" groaned Randolph, and asked immediately: "What's that fierce sad-sounding

word you have in your language, Victor? You know, when, when the girl says he looks like the real one, but 'she fears we both have been mistaken.'?"

*"Hélas!"* said Victor, smothering a laugh.

"Say it again, and laugh right out," said Randolph. "I can't laugh in this case."

Meanwhile, Lloyd had gone to his room. He had hardly shut the door behind him, when some one knocked. Opening it, he saw a hotel servant, who handed him a small envelope, murmuring:

"Very immediate, sir. No answer."

The servant hurried away as Lloyd shut the door and tore the envelope open.

The enclosure was Margery Herbert's card, on which she had scribbled:

"Have told them you would see me to the train. Will be on the veranda in five minutes. Am hurrying."

Three minutes later Lloyd was on the veranda, waiting for Margery. He felt

that her request, or demand, was an imposition. He was submitting to it with the grace of a man who is conscious that the woman's main motive is curiosity. He was irritated that she should make the demand as her right; but he had no intention of betraying his irritation. He thought, as he had often thought about her, that the cleverest and handsomest of women may be guilty of glaring stupidity when she cannot, or will not, admit to herself that neither her looks nor her cleverness maintains her illusion longer. The illusion a woman effects on a man is like a mirror. He sees all he expects to see in it, until it cracks; and then all he sees is distortion. In Margery's case the mirror had cracked long ago.

He knew he was sentimental. He had to be that, or be brutally cynical, which, in his opinion, was to have bad manners and a worse digestion. At his lowest, however, he strove to be sincere. He took the fashion from no one, in feelings or in ideas. Even in his most serious moments with Margery, he had failed to convince her of

his sincerity, however wild his ideas. The night in Paris, when he walked with her in the rain-mist, proved this to him conclusively. When he talked earnestly, excitedly of his summer plan, he knew she thought, for all she tried to conceal it, that his project was mildly imbecile. At once she prefigured him infatuated with a red-faced, clownish peasant girl. He smiled inwardly at the shock she would suffer when she laid eyes on Mme. La Sainte.

He had known, so long ago, Margery was not in love with him, that he understood more clearly her desire, as his best friend, to domineer pleasantly over his rule of life. If he were always gentle and docile as a trained pony, he was sure she would be very happy. It happened, however, that he, the easiest, quietest of social figures, in actual truth, had a pride and will, which, though submissive to the routine of his station, became unmanageable when one toyed with them as sure assets.

Therefore, he waited agreeably for Margery for fully twelve minutes on the veranda. As a clever woman, yet merely

clever, he reasoned, she kept him waiting thus, to stimulate his interest in her request. He found compensation in his concern to ascertain how and why she knew the whole countryside was buzzing, as she had said, with his falling in love down at Vassilly.

Lloyd was in the wrong in assuming that of purpose she had kept him waiting twelve minutes on the veranda. Margery could have had no such intention, because she was fully aware that she must catch the train going to Cabourg, where she had promised to be for dinner. In Evelyn's room, however, whither she had repaired, "to take a look at herself in the glass," as she said, a conversation had been precipitated by a chance remark.

"Margery," said Evelyn, as Mrs. Herbert was fixing her hair and her hat before the mirror, "this is one of the frequent days when you are the best-looking woman I've ever seen." Evelyn laughed in her quiet, frank manner, and added: "The compliment comes honestly from me, you know, my dear, because I'm not ashamed

of my own face and figure. Even Randolph has said I have something beyond the fact that I'm his sister to make people stop and look."

Margery had long appreciated what Lloyd once described as "the quiet majesty of Evelyn Strong's slender grace and rich dark coloring. So they discussed each other's points of attraction in veiled, hesitant analysis. They considered Mrs. Aiken's fluffy charm, and drifted swiftly into an examination of the virtues and defects of the men they knew—of Evelyn's husband, of Alonzo Aiken, and of Randolph, whom Margery praised with unusual warmth. By natural progression they reached Lloyd Avery.

"Of course, you will marry him eventually," Evelyn dared to say, although Margery's statements about him had been the merest impersonalities.

By way of reply, Margery told her version of his falling in love at Vassilly. Evelyn was astounded; and before she could even think of a commonplace to

utter, Margery said Lloyd had promised to see her to the train, and hurried away.

The same evening, when they were dining alone, Evelyn narrated the amazing story to Mrs. Aiken, whose pretty face was quite vacuous as she commented: "What a strange, romantic affair!"

Margery apologized with stress when she appeared on the veranda at the moment Lloyd was consulting his watch.

"It's all right," he said, "but we haven't got time to walk. I called a carriage."

They sprang into the little victoria, the driver's whip cracked like a shot, and the horse made a frantic start, soon settling into a trot.

"I meant to ask you if I might see you to the train," he said significantly, "but you ran away."

"Have you given up your castle?" she asked.

"Not exactly, though I don't know whether I shall go back there. Why do you ask?"

"I shouldn't think it would be very cheerful for you ever to go back, Lloyd."

"Why not?" His tone was almost peremptory.

"I apologize, Lloyd," she said, evidently wounded. "Of course, even an old friend's interest should not be poking into such a matter."

"Margery," he declared sternly, "you talk as though I had done something I wish to conceal—almost as though I had done something I ought to be ashamed of."

"Bless you, Lloyd," she cried with a short laugh; "I am not my brother's keeper, nor his judge."

"What do you know about my doings at Vassilly?"

"Nothing more than you did, I assure you."

"You mean I fell in love there?"

"Do you deny that you fell in love there?"

"Who told you that?"

"The woman who kept house for you at the castle. I forget her name for the moment."

"Mère Lafosse?"

"I suppose that's it. There was only one woman left on the premises—at least, so she said, when I was there."

He smiled. "Margery," he said, "not even in your fertile imagination, I dare say, can I be seen in love with Mère Lafosse."

Laughing artificially, she answered: "Lloyd, let's turn it off with a joke. I ought to have known better than to consider such a love-affair other than a facile man's summer pleasantry."

The gibe, delivered in her most melodious voice, sent a chill of rage to his heart. He could not speak for a few moments. How had he miscontrived thus to let Margery Herbert cast a fleer at Mme. La Sainte?

Before his mind's eye rose the seraphic beauty of her face in the convent garden. In his brain echoed her single ominous word "Adieu." At last, he observed to himself, Margery had succeeded in making him infuriated against her. Yet there came upon him a suggestion of caution and astuteness.

If Margery had probed Mère Lafosse so thoroughly as to learn that he was in love with Mme. La Sainte—he stopped. How could Mère Lafosse have made the statement? She had told Margery, no doubt, of his acquaintance with the lady cheesemaker, and Margery had imagined the romantic sequent. She had no doubt pumped out of the simple old peasant woman the whole tragedy of Mme. La Sainte's history. Perhaps she had learned also the actual name of the cheesemaker.

Margery broke the silence, saying: "I hope I am not late for the train."

They were near the station.

With recovered poise, he asked: "What's the name of the woman in my case, Margery?"

Conquest shone in her smile, as she replied: "Then you admit that you did fall in love with her? Her name? I'm sure I can't recall. They have such a queer way down there. Your housekeeper spoke of you continually as *l'Américain!* But what matters the name?"

"Names down there matter a good deal

just now," he said, more to himself than to her.

"Does anything matter now?" she asked cryptically.

"Never so much as now," he answered. "And I should like to make sure of one thing. Did you know positively that you understood what Mère Lafosse in her Norman dialect was saying? I am convinced of your familiarity with Parisian French, but they talk differently at Vassilly. I did fall in love down there, perhaps, without knowing it, but——"

The carriage drew up at the station. Margery gave him her hand, alighting, and said, only to leave him worse confounded:

"Lloyd, my respect for you begins to return."

"What?" he gasped.

She had run into the station. He hurried after her. The train for Cabourg had left five minutes before. He begged her to go back to the hotel and dine there with Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken.

"Foiled again!" came a shrill voice from the roadway.

Both phrase and voice were unmistakably Randolph's. They looked up and saw Randolph and Victor in a red touring car. Victor was at the wheel.

"We came five minutes ago," Randolph cried, "to bid you good-by at the train. Now, we'll take you back in the nice big bubble Victor's ma gave him for being a good boy, and we'll make you eat dinner with us."

Victor swung the car round to the curb.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Margery. "You'll take me to Cabourg like two good boys. I've got to be there for dinner, no matter how I get there."

"We are the game," cried Victor, whose academic English was becoming streaked with Randolph's vernacular.

Randolph jumped down to help Mrs. Herbert to her seat.

"Hop on," he urged Lloyd. "We'll have full moon coming home."

Lloyd demurred, with thanks to Vic-

tor and Randolph, with regrets to Margery.

Randolph seated himself beside her. As they moved away, he called out to Lloyd: "Say, about those letters you have to write, why don't you hire a stenographer?"

Lloyd told his cabman to go back to the hotel, and stepped into the little victoria, as the big red car slunk down the avenue.

It was not without knowing the facts that Randolph had said Victor's automobile was given to him because he was a good boy. Mme. de Fesnières was willing to allow her only son anything, with a stretch of her means or her influence, once Victor had made up his mind that he could never marry Mrs. Herbert, and that he would not go rashly into Labrador. His mother's heart-attack kept her in bed for a fortnight, but also gained her point.

The machine had been brought to the hotel that Randolph and Victor might

use it to go to the club for dinner. They endeavored to persuade Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken to join them, but ineffectually. Instead, Evelyn, doubting whether Margery would be in time for her train, had suggested that they meet her at the station. They had gone a roundabout way, so they might travel the faster; and Randolph was overjoyed that Margery refused to go back to his sister. That afternoon he had not played golf, which was his intention, because Margery Herbert had suddenly appeared at Trouville. He had begged off his engagement with Victor and had spent his time with her. They sat on the hotel veranda, they strolled about the town, they walked to the loneliest parts of the beach; and he asked her to marry him three several times. The last refusal she made was accompanied by such an explicit statement of disinclination, without any reason save no, that he was utterly chagrined. He felt he could never again maneuver a situation which would permit him to repeat his plea.

And now he and she might just as well

have been all alone in the world. The car picked up speed as they got on the open road, and Victor was completely absorbed in his machine, because he did not sit behind the wheel except to try for a record. When he had swept up one mile under the hard, smooth tires, and the second loomed clear and white ahead, the man and woman in the tonneau ceased to exist for him.

To whirl thus through the country was sedative to Margery's tense nerves. Randolph said a few words to her, asking whether she was seated at ease. She did not answer, but laid her hand on his arm in friendly understanding of his interest. Randolph was moved, perhaps more deeply than she guessed; and he remained silent and still for fear the little gloved hand he valued so much should take itself away, for fear a jolt or turn of the bounding car should break the spell it cast. She might have none of him; but she was resting her arm on his, which meant much to him. And the monstrous new moon rose up from somewhere, staring at them in amazement. Randolph returned the

moon's stare, for he had not the courage to turn his head and look at her.

They took a sharp curve at a flash. The gloved fingers clutched his coat sleeve. Randolph grinned ecstatically at the moon, then trembled inwardly lest she should stop holding his sleeve. He wished, above all desire, that he might divine what she was thinking. Dare he plead with her just once more—the last time? He remembered bitterly the three several approaches he had made this afternoon. Considering his feelings toward her, how utterly futile his words had seemed. Now, in the cold gaze of the moon, what an echo of the sophomoric was his declaration that she was the only woman he had ever wanted or asked to be his wife. It was true. Had she believed him, and, believing him, had she smiled within herself? Suddenly into his mind flooded memories from the years he had known her. He repeated to himself his realization of weeks ago that he had always cared for her. In former days, however, he never talked to a woman without making her laugh so that

she immediately looked upon him as a funny man. Margery Herbert he amused more than all the others. Only when he was sick and homesick in the Paris hotel had come his awakening. It was jolly to be a fool for other people, when one was not a fool for one's self. He looked up at the moon helplessly; and before he knew it, he was holding her hand very tight in his.

She leaned over close to him. The noise and whir of the machine was deafening.

"Did you speak, Ranney?" she asked.

He never knew how he ventured to do so, but her face was near and he kissed her through the veil.

"I told you to-day," he muttered hoarsely, "you are the first. I tell you now you are the last."

She started back on her seat with a shiver. Her hand shrunk from his arm. On they spun into Cabourg; and Randolph Cooper did not know whether he was the happiest or unhappiest of men.

## CHAPTER XXII

### MAD PURSUIT

THE next morning Lloyd breakfasted at an unusual hour and alone. The night before he had informed the others he was going for an early ride. The horse ordered was brought to him as he issued from the hotel. He had no trouble in following the way back to the massive building on the hill, with its cross of gold. His greater fortune was to come upon Adam, the gardener, at the gate.

"But, monsieur," exclaimed the gardener, after *bon jour,* "at this hour so *matinale* nobody visits the park."

"I didn't come to visit the park particularly," the American returned slowly. "I wanted to inquire whether you had chanced to find a gold pencil near the grotto where I was yesterday?"

The gardener's eyes widened. "No, monsieur. I have found nothing; but, then, I have looked for nothing. I shall go now at once. If monsieur lost it there——"

"I'm not at all sure, you know, yet I thought I would have a look there, if you don't mind."

The gardener meditated, glanced up at the building, and then at his watch. "They are at high mass this morning," he said. "If monsieur will not be too long——"

The American quickly tied his horse to a post.

"He will not be frightened?" the gardener hinted.

"He's very quiet. Besides, he's tired."

They went along the Avenue de la Sainte Trinité, with searching eyes on the pebbled path. At the grotto they turned and made their most attentive examination. Adam, mindful of yesterday's yellow ten-franc piece, got down heavily on his knees and ran conscientious glances along the little trench, hollowed at the root

of the hedge. Meanwhile, the American scrutinized the flower-bed at the foot of the grotto, where he warily let fall a small, sealed envelope, on which was written: "Pour Mme. La Sainte." The card which it enclosed bore above the address: *"De grace, un mot je vous en supplie."* He studied the position of the envelope dubiously. Was it too conspicuous? Could it be seen at all?

*"Eh, bien, monsieur,"* Adam puffed, rising with difficulty. "I do not think it is here."

"It doesn't seem to be," the other replied, turning sharply. "Do many people come to the grotto?"

"Very few, monsieur. You see, this is the old grotto. The new one, quite on the other side, is much finer; there the statue is all gold. Yet if the pencil should be found, monsieur may be sure it will be given to one of the good sisters."

"I'm sure of that. Evidently, it was not lost here." The visitor produced the ten-franc piece.

Adam accepted it with unctuous grati-

tude. "If monsieur will come again, in case——"

"I may, if I have time. Thank you, Adam."

The gardener conducted him to the gate, where he rode away swiftly, as if his impatience of delay might speed the end.

Five long days passed. Impatience became anxiety. Had the little envelope gone astray? Had the puffy gardener sliced it into waste-paper with his capacious shears? Still, she herself might have chanced upon it, might even have torn the envelope open, merely out of curiosity. Of course, she would guess at sight from whom it came. Could she have destroyed it unopened?

He watched the mails unwearyingly; left urgent instructions at the office of the hotel that any letter should be delivered to him as soon as received, and before going out invariably told the clerk where he could be reached.

This afternoon he was dressing for *le five o'clock* of Mme. de Fesnières, who had come to her villa from the convent. After

to-morrow he would be at Cabourg for luncheon.

In the next room Randolph was holding converse with himself on the stupidity of tea at any time, and the inexcusability of it in midsummer.

"Thank the Lord," he was saying, "'Alonzo dear' and Billy will be here to-morrow. Then I can take my tea in a high glass with soda at five o'clock, six, seven, or eleven."

A knock at the door interrupted his remarks.

"A letter for M. Avery," the boy announced, in reply to Randolph's summons.

"Next door. Here, I'll give it to him." Randolph took the letter to his friend. "Here's a letter, old man. I hope it's the one you've been worrying about. Blonde or brunette?"

Lloyd cut the envelope and scanned the contents with feigned composure.

Randolph turned to go.

"I say, old man," his friend cried, "will you wait a moment?"

"What's the matter? Is your castle on fire?"

"Do you think I could cut that tea at Mme. de Fesnières?"

Randolph's gray eyes twinkled. "It's a case of girl, of course?"

"I must answer this letter at once and——"

"Such things take time."

"Do you think Evelyn or Mrs. Aiken would mind?"

"My dear innocent, as they are both married, they would let you out of any engagement in a case of girl. It's the freemasonry of the sex. But think of me. I don't mind the tea so much, though it will be slow as prunes; but I'm worried about you. A man of your attractions and tender years can't be too careful, especially when traveling alone. I wish I might tell you my experiences."

"You're sure they won't mind?"

"I wish I was as sure about you. I'll make it all right. We'll see you at dinner."

"Yes. Thanks, old chap."

Randolph was gone. Lloyd re-read the letter, conning each line avidly:

When you came, like an apparition, that day in the park, it was the time of silence. Even if it had not been, I could not have found words. I do not fathom by what strange chance you happened in that last corner of earth.

You are given to dreams, as I told you once; perhaps, also, to inspiration, so that even you yourself are surprised in retrospect.

Please do not think that I misunderstood, and that I am without appreciation. Yet we have known each other only in mask—a mask raised by the grimmest of realities.

For you, the place down there was the refuge of one bored. I have lived there with memories I hardly cherished, yet dare not flee. Then there was the purpose, for which I chose to lead that life. You lived without one. I doubt not you are equally happy.

When I shall return to Bretêche, I do

not know. Aunt Cécile is now in Paris with her sister, and I go to join her to-morrow, unless present plans fail. As hotel-life in town is very trying to me, I shall not remain in Paris any longer than I can help.

Your kindness and goodwill I shall remember gratefully. Even your dream-talk, perhaps, may recur to me in this world of stern fact. In return, the mite I can offer, I bid you take in all faith, my utter wish that all may always be well with you. It sounds conventional, doesn't it? You will know, I am sure, that I mean it earnestly.

*Finita comedia—addio!*

STÉPHANIE DE LESCURE.

Lloyd smoked a cigarette of reflection after the second reading of the letter. He waited till there could be no doubt that the others had gone, and then went to the telephone.

Did they have such an appliance as a telephone in the convent? He paused on the way. Noting that he was nervous, he

assumed that he had been smoking too much. Quite unconsciously, he lighted a fresh cigarette, while seeking information from the clerk in the office. Yes, there was a telephone in the convent. Part of the building was used as a school during ten months of the year. It seemed an hour before he got into communication with the number.

Mme. de Lescure had gone. That day? Assuredly. The train? One did not know. No; she would not return. To Paris? Yes. She had gone—yes— The rest was chaotic buzzing, a vanishing voice, and silence.

After writing a note of veiled explanation to Randolph, he huddled the things nearest at hand into his traveling-bag and caught the five-twenty train for Paris.

At the station he walked the whole length of the train, peering into each compartment—first, second and third class—not omitting *"Fumeurs"* and bestowing especial scrutiny on those labeled *"Dames Seules."* Standing on the step till the train began to move, and the guard ran

along slamming doors, he watched the tardy arrivals gathered in excitedly.

After all, he could not be greatly disappointed that she was not on this train. She had gone on the earlier one, to reach Paris before night.

Only for a few days she would be at a hotel there. A hotel? Paris was a wilderness of hotels. Yet, there was only a certain kind of hotel at which she and Aunt Cécile would stay. He judged it must be one of a dozen he could cite from memory. Search for her in a dozen hotels? He would apply at twenty, at fifty. She must be traced. Had she not said she did not know when she would return to Bretêche? That might mean a week; it might mean three months. Delay now was not only intolerable—it was dangerous. And Margery Herbert had called it "a summer pleasantry."

He read the letter again, lingering over the last line: *"Finita comedia—addio!"* Was he a comedian, after all?

The train leaped along chatteringly. Through the windows at either side the

landscape glided, mysterious with dusk. Pin-points of lights showed and were gone in the vast outside he traversed ever, and that still stretched out, unending. What an interminable journey!

He repeated her name in a whisper: "Stéphanie—Stéphanie!"

How new it was—how old and familiar! He had said it before now. He had heard others say it. Had they not always known each other? . . . Again the name seemed new, vague, elusive. She was the lure of the far-away, that had summoned him long, and still evaded.

Meanwhile, Margery Herbert's story of his love-affair down at Vassilly had much perturbed the minds of Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken. If Lloyd had not been quite so absorbed in his hopes and aims to see Mme. de Lescure, he might have noticed a certain mistrustfulness, not to say coldness, in their attitude. He might have wondered why Randolph had suggested that, if it was "a case of girl," he could very well be excused from the tea. Lloyd,

however, was in the lure of the far-away, and saw neither sign nor portent. Could he have heard Margery's story as she told it to Evelyn, he would have been even more astonished than he had been at the mere fact that she knew anything at all of his Vassilly adventure. He would, moreover, have been able to prevent pain and misunderstanding. And though he would have been just as determined to find Mme. de Lescure, he would not, in all probability, have left Trouville.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### LUNCHEON AND A STORY

THE second day following Lloyd's disappearance Mrs. Herbert gave the luncheon for Eleanor de Guerville at Cabourg. Margery was always brilliant on such an occasion, in herself and in her management. To-day she felt with frank self-esteem that she excelled all previous efforts. It is true, she had lost three of her promised guests; in their place, however, she had three who were even preferable.

A telegram from Lloyd, at Paris, said he had been imperatively called away. For a moment a spark of remorse flickered in Margery's soul. Of course she had been bitter to him. How could she have been otherwise, in view of his uncandid reticence. If only he had admit-

ted the truth at once! Their long friendship warranted her in expecting as much.

The sudden call to Paris was, she made no doubt, a simple evasion. Perhaps she would not see him again this summer. Quite as well, she told herself, because, as time went on, his nice way of looking at things in general seemed to be growing into querulousness. What a testy old person he would be at fifty! Better a man who had never learned to look at the wrong side of the cloth of life, and who, when he saw it by accident, only laughed.

Evelyn and Mrs. Aiken also sent regrets. Their husbands arrived at Havre the day before the luncheon, and immediately took them off on a journey to Switzerland. Margery never longed for Mrs. Aiken's company. It may have been for the reason that she was too much like a weak imitation of herself. Mrs. Aiken had frequently shown a tendency to copy tricks of Margery's style, which flattery was distasteful to Margery because, as she had said once, it was so unbecoming to Mrs. Aiken. It was not difficult, there-

fore, to forego her, especially when her seat was occupied by Mme. de Fesnières. Then, while Margery was fond of Evelyn, she could scarcely be reproached if she took interest in the fact that her place was filled by Victor's fiancée presumptive, Mme. Stéphanie de Lescure.

To a woman of Margery's keen, worldly intelligence there was as great a fascination about Mme. de Lescure as attached itself to a celebrated pianist or any other freak. She did not expect to like her or to understand her. What attractiveness could she have? Many women had bad husbands, but that did not drive them into the martyrdom this one evidently inflicted on herself. Margery had heard so much about her isolated life and her good works among the peasants that she fancied Stéphanie must be by nature a nun. This was a type of her sex for which Margery had a congenital repugnance. She had maneuvered cleverly, nevertheless, in order to insure Mme. de Lescure's presence at the luncheon. She had a mild curiosity to make a study of the woman Victor was

going to marry; and she had every wish to please Victor's mother.

Though Mme. de Fesnières had never had any but the warmest expressed admiration for her, Margery knew in her heart that the proud old lady had harbored, not a grudge, but a mistrust of her for having allowed Victor to fall in love with her. Women have no illusions about each other when there is a man between them. Mme. de Fesnières's friendship for Margery abated not, because she planned to make sure of her as an ally in her marriage project for Victor. The abrupt demise of Stéphanie's husband, at a time when most of his friends had given up hoping for it as the result of the motor accident, allowed Mme. de Fesnières a clear course. She had none to reckon with thenceforward save Victor and Stéphanie; and she was too long of this world to slight the least association of aid.

Once Victor realized that he was somehow ridiculous in his infatuation for Mrs. Herbert, which he did when his mother's illness turned his point of view to a new

angle, he resolved never to be in love again. He had been falling in love year in and year out since he was eighteen, and always to his disappointment and chagrin. He told his mother he was cured, and that, as he must have something to think about, he would go into business in the fall. His mother agreed with him wholly, and, so he might have a summer of outdoors against the time he would be confined by affairs, she bought Victor the most expensive motor-car she could afford. The car, and his mother's unfailing easy charm with him, caused Victor to be particularly agreeable to Stéphanie when she came to join his mother for the retreat at the convent.

Then happened the tragic interlude that made Stéphanie free. All the family, down to the remotest members, hurried to Paris. Maurice de Lescure left a great fortune behind him, they knew, or felt they knew; and it is a satisfaction to wear deep mourning when the deceased leaves one money to pay for it. All were in an emotional state. All showed it, ex-

cept Stéphanie, who remained quiet, calm, inscrutable, at least in the presence of the others. Victor and his mother were with her constantly until she left Paris.

His new scheme of life, he learned one day, to his surprise, was blown into thin air. Three days after they were settled in the convent he wrote to Stéphanie, telling her of his love for her. The letter was distraught and incoherent to a degree, but it was as sincere as he could make it. In a letter to his mother, sent at the same time, Victor confessed his intentions, asked his mother's blessing, and begged her to help him as she might.

It was unnecessary that he ask her for support, he was aware, but that he did need help he was equally aware. As distant kinswoman of Stéphanie, and always a counselor, his mother's influence should not be small. His letters to Stéphanie grew in number until she was receiving three each day at the convent. Stéphanie acknowledged the first, saying frankly that she could not but appreciate what he had written, but that she was in no frame

of mind to consider it now. Once again she wrote, asking him not to send any more letters, though she appreciated them, etc.—but for the present she required the absolute repose and isolation for which she had come to the convent.

Mme. de Fesnières was general enough to read the omens of her campaign. If Victor was to win Stéphanie, he must prove a cleverer courtier than most men. And she was quietly and proudly determined that he should win her. Her own days were numbered, she was only too certain. The more reason why she should not miss a detail to effect what she was convinced would be a happy marriage. Consequently, when Stéphanie was all ready to start for Paris the day they left the convent, she argued delicately, diplomatically, persistently until she succeeded in persuading her to remain at Trouville for a fortnight of the sea air.

Thus Margery Herbert was co-operating effectively with her when she invited them to luncheon at Cabourg. Though Stéphanie tried to evade it, Mme. de Fes-

nières gently urged her to go. Eleanor de Guerville would be there. Surely she was an old friend. Besides, Mrs. Herbert was one of those splendid Americans who are a tonic, they are so fresh and bracing. Then there was that American friend of Victor's, Mr. Cooper, who was a curiosity, if nothing more. Stéphanie laughed, said she felt as though she were acting the convalescent, and came to the luncheon smiling.

Margery soon saw how rapturous her presence made Victor. She had seen Victor rapturous before. There was some indefinable charm about her, however, that even brought back Randolph's good humor. This had quite deserted him since the episode of the kiss in Victor's motor-car. When they got to the hotel that night, and said good-by, Margery acted as if she had no cognizance of what had passed. Randolph wrote the next morning what he described to himself as "a lava-flow of penitence and remorse." In reply he got a telegram saying: "Don't forget to come to luncheon."

On reading it, Randolph said to himself: "This reads like a code message. I wonder if it means, 'Peace, thy heart! Ring off!' "

He came and found the worst, he thought, for Margery was neither cold nor warm, neither far nor near. The luncheon was growing to be an ordeal, until Mme. de Lescure captured his attention. They spoke English, on his account, he felt dolefully, and she spoke correctly, but with an accent unlike any he had ever heard. He supposed it was because he had some difficulty in making out what she said that he found her so pleasant to listen to; and as he covertly made inspection of her appearance he said to himself he must not forget to tell Victor what a pretty woman he had chosen.

Although, as hostess, she had many things to engage her mind and her eyes, Margery took shrewd notice of the mysterious Stéphanie, whom she was disappointed not to find entirely disappointing. One always is disappointed about people of whom one has heard much in advance.

Victor had said that her eyes and her hair were wonderful. The hair was opulent, lustrous black, and dressed in what Margery would have described as a quaint, smart mode. A sheer white lock grew above the left temple. The eyes Margery hardly thought wonderful. To her they were rather unsatisfactory. They seemed to be neither gray, blue, nor violet. She was built rather too slenderly, but well proportioned; and her neck and shoulders might evidently front the light of day or night without fear and without reproach. Her face was pale, vividly, as her full, well-carved mouth was vividly red. She bore herself with innate nobility; but, after all, thought Margery, she was more like a living copy of some old master than an actual woman of the brilliant, alert, joyous present. She could quite understand how Victor, whose head teemed with Ronsard and all the poets since his day, should have fallen in love with her. According to Margery's final judgment, she was too calm, too self-possessed, almost dehumanized.

Eleanor de Guerville found Stéphanie to be about the same as she had been two years before, the last time they had seen each other. The single lock of gray hair was a mark of time and grief; and there was an occasional suspicion of lack-interest in her voice and in her glance. Eleanor recalled in a flash of memory the buoyant, smiling Stéphanie she had known long ago, and asked herself wonderingly whether Victor was the man to make her happy. Or had Stéphanie ceased believing in happiness? Did she look now only for peace and the content of those who, weary of the stress, let the world glide or whirl by as it will? What Eleanor really meant to ask herself was whether Stéphanie believed in Victor.

If Stéphanie de Lescure had any consciousness of the mental observations being made on her, while all Margery's guests and Margery herself conversed pleasantly, brightly, fluently, on twenty various topics, she did not permit herself to show it.

"At twenty-five," Randolph was say-

ing, apropos of marriage, the subject that came with the coffee, "a man is afraid he will get married despite his best intentions. At thirty-five he's afraid he won't."

"At thirty-five," said Stéphanie, smiling above very white small teeth, "a woman no longer fears. She is in despair."

"I don't think so," Margery interposed, laughing; "at thirty-five a woman dares."

"But that's so long to wait," Randolph popped out before he was aware. He was looking straight into Margery's eyes. They all laughed. Margery laughed louder than the others, though her cheeks flushed. She turned her glance sharply away from Randolph, who was sure he had made another misplay. Margery's swift change of focus was to see whether any one had guessed Randolph's personal allusion. She was sure it had passed unscathed, which did not prevent her from bestowing a most polite and cold pair of blue eyes on Randolph the next moment.

"Ah, my children," Mme. de Fesnières began in her friendly, autocratic tone, "you may well talk lightly about such

things, as little girls and boys in the park toss their ball wildly in the air. We who are old, we know. You laugh at our wisdom. We, too, have laughed in our time. But now, in the long perspective of threescore years, we see things in their true proportions."

Her piercing black eyes and fine, sharp nose examined the circle of faces attentively grouped about her. She took them in one after the other, and while she did so the luxurious little room was for the first time still and silent.

"The conceit of age," she went on, tapping the table lightly with her lorgnette, "that's what you are thinking of. Well, it is minor compared to the conceit of youth. You, and we who go before you, have lived a life that is like a polite comedy. In truth, if it were not for us there would be no polite comedy. We have never known cold, hunger, privation of any kind, save of privileges, of which the more we get the more we want. Let us hope we may never know them, but also let us make good use of the favors

of our destiny. Grief and sorrow will not overlook us for all the advantages of our position. Let us have an anchor to steady us when they do come—faith in ourselves and in those we love. And let us not again preach a sermon at so beautiful a luncheon-party, as I have done. Now I——"

Unanimously they interrupted her with light applause.

Mme. de Fesnières rose, as did the others. "Now I am going over to the cottage, my dear Margery, to see your mother. She will have no visitors under fifty, so I must leave you all here."

"And no doctors over fifty," said Margery, smiling. "That's the distinction mother makes between science and experience."

"We have many tastes in common," continued Mme. de Fesnières, as they went out. "For instance, she reads memoirs, I read the newspapers. Memoirs are only newspapers of another period. Now, you young folk read novels, which are *réchauffés* of the newspapers with sauce *à*

*la Balzac* or *à la Bourget,* as the case may be."

"This is getting to be too much like an experience meeting for my taste," Randolph thought, as he murmured to Victor: "Let's leave the girls to themselves, while your mother pays her visit, and go find the billiard-room."

Victor would have preferred to remain with the women, so that he might be near Stéphanie. They went off together, however, to Margery's rooms, where, under pretense of taking part in talk, half conversation, half gossip, Stéphanie's thoughts wandered afar.

She realized, with a start, that she was miscast on this stage of polite comedy. To have nothing to do but amuse oneself till tired, to eat as a means of meeting people, not for hunger; to skim the surface of life always; to be changing one's beliefs with the fashions, twice a year; to be bored with life and in constant dread of the mere word death—what a prison-house to call "the world." A vision of Bretêche and Vassilly rose before her in this exquis-

ite boudoir, peering through a daintily curtained window at the sunlit turquoise sea. Mère Lafosse was calling her, she was sure, and the echo of the steady hum of labor about the cheese-factory rang in her ears like faint music. From the balcony off the somber dining-room she could see the cows grazing in the lush meadow. Behind her came Aunt Cécile, tapping her ebony cane on the polished floor.

Her abode in exile had become her home, and she was homesick to-day. The idea of surrendering it to marry Victor was preposterous. She had been considerate both of Victor and of his mother, but had never given either of them encouragement in their hopes. When they got back to Trouville, she must declare herself irrevocably.

Of course, she could not go back to Bretêche until September, when the American's lease of Dorp would be over. She had no wish to meet him again, though the whole episode of their acquaintanceship was a haunting memory.

Suddenly she became alert to the actual,

for Margery was saying, in the tone of one who has a good story to tell: "—— took a château down there. The maddest idea, I thought it from the beginning. A farm girl fell in love with him—madly, of course. He has his points. He had nothing to do, no one to meet except peasants, and the girl, I suppose. And when he went away she committed suicide by throwing herself in the river, I believe."

"Why, that's perfectly horrible," Eleanor gasped.

"To make matters worse," Margery continued, "it was he himself who found the body."

"What in the world did he do?" asked Eleanor.

"What could he do? He attended the funeral and left a large sum of money with his housekeeper to have a monument put on the girl's grave. Mind you, I don't blame him, because I think he's incapable of doing anything base. But I do think he was criminally rash in going like that among those people. One ought to remain in one's class. I doubt whether he

ever did the least thing to encourage the girl, but as I said——"

"How did you find out about it?" Eleanor inquired.

"From his housekeeper. Lafosse, I think, he said her name is."

Stéphanie became pallid. Her lips were trembling. She rose quickly and walked to the window.

"Are you ill?" Margery cried, alarmed, and got up to find her salts.

"It's a dreadful story," Eleanor said, going over to Stéphanie and winding an arm about her waist. "Are you sure it's true?"

"Thank you, I am quite all right," Stéphanie insisted quietly, declining the pretty silver vial offered by Margery. "I'm awfully tired, that's all."

"I'm awfully sorry if the story upset you," Margery said abjectly.

"Not in the least, my dear Mrs. Herbert. It made me think of a similar one I heard down in the country. A man leased a château for the summer and lived there all alone. The farmer's wife was

his housekeeper. She had a great, ungainly servant who had been twice jilted by her sweethearts. The third time she was jilted she killed herself. The tenant of the château had promised her fiancé a handsome dowry, out of simple charity. When he knew it was too late, he left the money with the housekeeper that she might put a stone on the girl's grave."

"Why, it sounds like another version of the same story!" Eleanor exclaimed. "But you said, Margery, he admitted to you he had fallen in love with a girl down there, didn't you?"

"He did admit it," Margery replied, disquieted by a veiled tone of mastery behind Mme. de Lescure's serene eyes.

"I'm sure it couldn't be the same story," said Stéphanie, deferring to Mrs. Herbert with a smile. "There must be two stories —with coincidences."

Again Margery suspected rather than felt the shadow of mastery, and she made up her mind she could never like Victor's

presumptive wife. She was about to inquire whether the man in her story was French or American when Mme. de Fesnières was announced.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE INCOMPARABLE WOMAN

Balanced on two legs of the chair, his feet against the rail of the veranda, Randolph was blowing smoke-rings out to sea. He looked enviably cool in a suit of white flannel, lined with faint stripes. His crumpled, wide-spreading Panama, pushed back on his head, gave him the air of a comic desperado.

A fiacre drew up at the carriage entrance of the hotel. His little gray eyes blinked humorously as he saw Lloyd get out and hand his bag to a porter. Without changing his position, he watched his friend come toward the main doors at the center of the veranda. When he was about to go in, Randolph whistled the sharp call of the quail.

Lloyd stopped and, looking round,

caught sight of him. Randolph waved his hand beckoningly.

"Hallo!" he said with mock surliness when Lloyd drew near.

"How are things?" Lloyd asked wearily. "How are you all?"

"I all am fine. A free man again," Randolph replied, proudly blowing out a long streamer of smoke.

"Are the girls gone?"

"Gone and completely forgotten, thank you." Randolph raised his hat and bowed. "Billy and 'Alonzo dear' wanted me to be of the party for Switzerland, but I made a successful retreat, to quote the immortal line of the Russian generals. It was tough enough to have the girls alone, but to be round like an extra deuce was more than my haughty soul could chew. They were so exasperatingly happy, old man, that I actually began to wonder what there is in this world for such as you and me. A single man fits in anywhere; but when he gets to be known as a bachelor, his only use is to fill emergency gaps. I'm sick of it. So I stayed behind for you, oh, mysterious

friend, from whom I've heard nothing for two long days. I've been thinking of sending an alarm out. What's up? You look as though you had been put through the third degree."

"I've been awfully busy."

"That's what they all say, and I always ask: 'Blonde or brunette?' "

"I mean it seriously."

"Don't I? Here, you've been ready to shoot off at tangents ever since I came. First, you skip back to the château and return with a fine story about a little country girl that killed herself. Then, you run away to Paris, when you're expected for tea and a luncheon, disappear for nearly three days, and—my son, beware!" Randolph pulled out his watch and looked at it. "At any moment you may hit a snag—and in the course of ten minutes I'm going over to Mme. de Fesnières's to play tennis with a peach. Let us both beware! Come along and shield me." Randolph stood up and crouched helplessly in the lee of his friend's shoulder.

"Who is she?" Lloyd asked, smiling.

"Who is she? What? She's it, my boy. First quality, triple X. A widow, too—at least, I think so. Heavens, if I should be mistaken!" He clapped his hand against his forehead with a loud smack. "I met her that day we went to tea."

"I'm afraid I should only be in the way, old man."

"Go on—she's not the one—the real one for me. Besides, I want you to meet old lady de Fesnières. You know Victor. You must win his mama, to say nothing of smiling on the peach, Mme. Lescure. She——"

"Madame who?" Lloyd asked, with an effort maintaining his calm.

"Mme. Lecour or Lescure, something like that. I haven't got to calling her by her first name yet. She's Victor's——"

"Are you going now?" Lloyd interrupted sharply, apparently absorbed in selecting a cigarette from his case. His fingers trembled.

"The sooner the better for me," Randolph cried. "Get into laundry clothes,

something soft and tender like this"—he stroked his flannel sleeve—"to suit my mood. Ah," he sighed burlesquely, "let's toss a ball first in her name—the real one, I mean, next to whom I look like rolled gold."

Alone in his room, Lloyd had opportunity to breathe hard over the intelligence Randolph had unwittingly afforded him. She was here within a few minutes' walk. Three days ago, in pursuing her to Paris, he had actually been running away from her. He would have met her that afternoon of the tea in their own world. And she had bidden him *adieu*—had gone out of his life. He wondered whether she had heard any one speak of him.

Now, he was to see her again; he must make haste. Was she a relative of the de Fesnières's? She had said she was going to Paris—"unless present plans fail." Suppose she were gone to Paris now? That was impossible. She had promised to play tennis with Randolph. He would hardly have thought she would care to play tennis with him. Randolph's enthusiasm about

her was justified, no doubt, yet hardly satisfactory. Of course, no one could help liking her. It might even be that she was extremely popular with men. What did he know of her, except in masquerade?

As Randolph and Lloyd reached the de Fesnières's villa, a dainty phaeton of rattan, drawn by a gray cob, stopped there. A dark, pretty woman in lavender got down and acknowledged cordially the greeting of the two Americans. Lloyd knew her at once, and, as Randolph was about to present him, interposed:

"It has been my good fortune to meet madame before."

"What do you think of that?" Randolph exclaimed. "Here I've been telling him what a bully surprise I had for him, and he never said a word. Tell me, Mme. Lescure——"

"Not Lescure, don't you know, please," she interrupted, "Letuire." She spelled the name.

"I beg your pardon," Randolph said, and turned to his friend, who was dis-

turbed between feelings of relief and disappointment. "Lloyd, erase Lescure from the scroll of your multiplex brain at once and finally. There is no such person."

"Ah, but you have the wrong, M. Coopaire," Victor's sister corrected. "There is one Mme. de Lescure. Do not say that you forget her."

They went up the steps and sat on the veranda. Lloyd's hope revived.

"Of course I don't," Randolph admitted readily. "I remember her perfectly. She was—er—let me see—well, it's not easy to describe her. There was a certain—er——"

"I see you have forgotten her," said Mme. Letuire.

"I have met so many charming people at your mother's," Randolph explained, "and you know I have a bad head for names."

"Mme. de Lescure has been more kind to you," she continued. "She told me just a little while before that M. Coopaire was

just what she expected an American to be."

"Great expectations!" Randolph cried. "Is she here now? I must be at my best."

"She has just gone. I went with them to the train."

Lloyd's expectant heart was leaden.

"I'm sorry. Say you're sorry, old man," said Randolph.

"I am sorry," Lloyd replied, meaning it more earnestly than they could know.

"She is coming back again," Mme. Letuire hinted with a provocative smile.

"Soon?" Lloyd asked.

"You see," Randolph interposed, "my friend is anxious."

Mme. Letuire smiled. "You are—how you say it, M. Coopaire, one blouffaire?"

"I have many accomplishments," he drawled, and held up his racket. "I play tennis, too."

"It is my regret that my brozzaire be not here," she rejoined, "to be the partner with M. Aviary. Victor, of course, accompanied Mme. de Lescure."

Lloyd was in a maze. What had Victor to do with her? The question presented itself again: Was she a relative of theirs? In what had just been said were hidden meanings for him that were, in turn, hopeful, disquieting, ominous.

"My friend is so fond of exercise," Randolph was saying, "that he could watch people at it all day long. Ah," he added, as he saw Mme. de Fesnières coming through the doorway, *"bon jour, madame, voose venny voir le lon tennise?"*

Mme. Letuire presented "M. Aviary" to her mother, who was charmed to meet him. She regretted he had been called away the afternoon she expected him with his friends to tea. The dignified old woman, whose white hair was piled in stately coils, looked worn and tired.

As the daughter and Randolph were going down to the court, Mme. de Fesnières inquired whether Stéphanie and Victor had caught their train.

The linked sound of the names smote Lloyd disagreeably.

"We sha'n't see them till dinner," said

Mme. de Fesnières to her daughter's affirmative reply.

She had not gone to Paris then. Lloyd bore an armchair to the corner of the veranda for Mme. de Fesnières, where he sat beside her, watching the tennis players. The old lady proceeded to ramble pleasantly in her well-tuned, polished French. The American listened serenely. He was thinking: "She will be here to-night." He listened irksomely. He was thinking: "She was with Victor. She would be with Victor the whole day."

In a little while the maid came to ask whether madame would drive. The carriage was ready. Before leaving, Mme. de Fesnières asked Lloyd to come in with his friend after dinner, if they should be disengaged. She was expecting some people. There would be music—if he liked music.

Lloyd said quickly that he was a great lover of music. He would see her to-night. Would he? He wanted to ask whether she would appear after dinner. He did not venture it.

On their way back to the hotel Randolph asked his friend what he thought of "the peach."

"She's a jolly sort and pretty. But why didn't you say she was Victor's sister? I would have known——"

"I did, you old fire-eater; but you were so crazy to meet her, you wouldn't wait to hear a word."

"By the way," Lloyd ventured, "she's not a widow, you know, at least not quite." He watched Randolph's expression askant.

"Well, she doesn't have to be a probated widow for me to play tennis with her, does she?" asked Randolph, laughing, and went on rather irrelevantly, it seemed to Lloyd: "Liking a woman, my son, is like getting on to the twists of a new coon-song. You hear it once, and it tickles you. You go round trying to pick it up all the time, listening to elevator-boys and street-organs. At last you get it, and you whistle it through all by yourself—pat! And then you can't shake the thing out of

your head. It tumpty-tumps in your think-box morning, noon and night."

"Apropos of——" Lloyd inquired.

"Don't look guilty, old man. As far as I can make out, you haven't got the tune yet."

"You don't mean yourself?"

"Friend," Randolph stopped for a second, and viewed him with comic, saddened gaze, "if you fall so hard, you'll hurt your face. Maybe I'm thinking of myself, maybe of you, maybe of Victor, who is going to marry this Lescure widow; who, sure, is a queen, even if her name is fierce to remember. I met her at Margery's luncheon, and say, Lloyd, while she is not my style at all, she's a—a—what's the word I want?"

"She's the incomparable woman in body and soul!" Lloyd exclaimed.

They had just reached the hotel. Randolph dropped on the steps in a heap.

"Great Cæsar's ghost, Lloyd!" he gasped, and paused in stupefaction. There was no mistaking his friend's tone. "Where did you meet her?"

"At Vassilly."

"Where you had the marked-down castle?"

"She lives near there."

"Runs a cheese-factory, doesn't she?" asked Randolph quickly.

"Yes."

"Husband was a cheap skate—died a little while ago?"

"That's the woman," said Lloyd calmly—"the incomparable woman."

"Say, Lloyd," Randolph continued, after a moment's silence, "dope this out for me. We had it all figured out that the girl you fell in love with down there was dead."

"What girl?"

"Why—the girl who drowned herself because you left the place. You ordered a monument for her, didn't you? Margery went down there in a motor with some friends. They looked you up, but you had gone. The housekeeper told her all about it. She seemed to think you were great because you ordered the monument."

Lloyd turned white with anger. He re-

frained from speaking for fully a minute. Then he said very quietly and with bitterness:

"I left that money with Mère Lafosse because I had promised it to the girl as a dowry. She had been jilted by two lovers —she was a big, unhandsome person, but faithful as a dog—and when the third one threw her over because he found a girl who had a big dowry, she disappeared. I got back about then, heard the story, and promised Zoë five hundred francs dowry. It spread all over like fire, and I thought it would tempt the girl out of hiding. . . . I found her body in the pool." He paused, then resumed delberately: "Ranney, the French they speak down there is quite different from the French Margery is accustomed to hear. And, to be precise, Margery's French at best is not thorough. I think she's an awfully nice and attractive woman; but to spread a story like that makes her appear a nuisance and a——"

"Lloyd! Shut down, shut down!" In a drawl Randolph growled the words.

Lloyd noticed his face redden and a sullen gleam show in his eyes.

The smile came back to Randolph's face the next moment as he said:

"She's the incomparable woman, my friend. I wish I were the man. On?"

Neither spoke again and they went into the hotel.

## CHAPTER XXV

### FATE AND HIS DESIRE

THERE was no moon that night, but the black velvet sky was luminous with stars, thick as snowflakes. Randolph and Lloyd walked slowly over to the de Fesnières's. At dinner they had agreed not to mention Vassilly again, and Randolph had promised to set Margery right, should the matter recur to notice, or when a favorable occasion presented itself. Lloyd guessed from his friend's attitude that Randolph was at a critical stage in his courtship, and he begged him not to touch the question. He himself would straighten it out with Margery some day. Randolph persisted that he was the one to talk to her. He did not want Lloyd to hurt Margery's feelings.

As they approached the villa they heard

music. Mounting the steps, they could see guests, motionless in attention, in the drawing-room. The veranda was held in the shadow of lowered awnings.

"We'll sit out here, old man," Randolph murmured, "till this turn is over." He took a step toward the left where he knew there were chairs.

Rather nervous at the thought of coming suddenly on Stéphanie among many people, Lloyd was about to follow Randolph, when a figure rose before them in the shadow.

"Is that Victor?" a voice asked.

Randolph stopped. "Pardon," he said, and, turning sharply, went into the house.

Lloyd had heard him whisper: "We'd better go in"; but, instead of following him, went toward the vision in darkness.

"Stéphanie!" he said breathlessly.

She laid her opened fingers against her right temple and gasped. Her whole weight leaned on the back of the heavy chair.

"The truants from Eden are back in their old world," he said; "the bright gilt

world, where men are tired, and women resigned. To find you here makes it all different."

"You must not see me here," she protested, and made as if she would go. Her bosom rose and fell with deep-drawn breathing.

"I must see you everywhere—always," he said passionately. "It is Fate, and my desire."

She looked up at him suddenly. No; beyond him. He saw dimly her lips apart, amazement in her eyes. He turned, and, on the instant, heard Victor's voice.

"Stéphanie!" There was the shock of angry surprise in his tone.

A burst of applause in the drawing-room sounded as if miles away.

"Good-evening," Lloyd said calmly.

"Good-evening," was the formal response. "I did not imagine you were so well acquainted with Mme. de Lescure," Victor added, with a bitter laugh.

She winced at the words, and murmured: "Please, Victor——"

"Mme. de Lescure and I," the Ameri-

can returned, with unruffled humor, "were neighbors in the country."

"Down there where the farm girl killed herself because you went away, I suppose." Victor had become insolently calm. He proceeded to light a cigarette.

In the flame of the match the three faces were plain—Victor's handsome and flushed, with a sneering smile under his mustache; Stéphanie's very pale, her lips trembling, fear in her eyes. The American's teeth had clicked together, and his jaw was set with an ugly, hard look. His eyes were blazing, though his voice was cold and steady, as he said:

"Don't light that cigarette!"

There was a certain ominousness in the command that made the match drop from Victor's fingers despite his wish to hold it.

"Sir," Victor cried hoarsely, "what do you mean?" He lighted a second match.

"I mean you're not to light that cigarette until you admit to Mme. de Lescure that the accusation you have just made is

a simple lie, based on misinformation, but a lie nevertheless."

Victor placed the match at the tip of his cigarette. He felt a hand, not heavily, but firmly, weighing on his arm.

"Don't light it!" The American ground the words between his teeth.

With an oath, Victor flung both match and cigarette to the floor, and made a savage drive with his right fist at the American's face. A little cry of terror escaped from Stéphanie, who stood her ground, though she quivered in every nerve. Lloyd parried Victor's shot, and seized his wrist between fingers that gripped like a vise.

"Leave my house, you ruffian!" Victor growled.

"Presently—presently," said Lloyd, still gripping the other's wrist. "If you're not man enough to take back a lie, which you've been silly enough ever to think credible, don't be an ass now and raise your hand to hit me. I'm a head taller than you, and fifteen pounds heavier. Besides," he added, easing his breath with a

laugh, "gentlemen don't fight, especially when a lady's present. Go inside, while I apologize for both of us." He let Victor's hand drop.

"You leave my house, sir!" cried Victor.

"Do go in, Victor," Stéphanie pleaded, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

"You come *with* me," he said sulkily.

"I shall not detain Mme. de Lescure two minutes," Lloyd interposed.

"Do go," Stéphanie entreated, and turned gently with him toward the corner of the house, where he entered from the side veranda.

"Two minutes," murmured Victor sullenly, as she left him.

She returned quickly to the American, offering her hand. "Don't apologize; don't explain——"

"But that crazy story about the farm girl at Dorp——"

"I've heard it, too; and I know the real story. I'll tell them. Believe me—and good-by. Won't you shake hands——"

"Come away with me. We belong. Can't you see that?"

"Good-by—all is said, my dear friend."

"Good-night, rather. I'll find you again, even though I can't come here very well. I'll haunt your dreams. Sleeping or waking, I shall always be before you."

He held her hand to his lips for an instant. She snatched it away, at the sound of a step, and ran to the side of the house.

Slowly he went down the steps, and through the garden to the avenue.

Victor was waiting for her in the doorway. They went into a little room here, at the foot of the staircase. The music could be heard faintly.

"At last I understand," Victor complained coldly. "He is the shadow between you and me, Stéphanie."

"You have no right to say that, Victor."

*"Eh, bien?* Did he not say, 'I must see you everywhere—always'?"

Her eyes flashed in the dim light. "You heard?"

"I could not avoid it."

"You ought to have avoided it."

He reached out and took her hand gently. "Have I not the right to hear?"

Raising her head slowly, she answered: "No."

"Then you love that American?" he concluded angrily.

She made no attempt to flee from him. He held her hand firmly.

"You do love him. I can see it, and, although I could not divine it before, I know now that he has been the barrier between us. And what do you know about him, except that he was living down there in the country, almost in disguise? And that disgraceful affair of the farm girl——"

"Is all wrong, my dear Victor. Mrs. Herbert got the story from Mère Lafosse, his housekeeper; and how she got it all so confused, I'm sure I don't know. Why, the woman cannot understand French. I——"

"She does understand it," he contradicted sharply.

"Then she doesn't understand the

Norman *patois,* because I heard the story from Mère Lafosse, and it's quite different from Mrs. Herbert's version. I know Mère Lafosse too well to—but, after all, everybody receives Mr. Avery, and your mother invited him here to-night, didn't she?"

"You love him," Victor repeated fiercely, under his breath; "and you have let me go on——"

"Stop, please," she interrupted, with sudden firmness.

"You can't deny it," he insisted.

"My dear Victor," she began, with assumed calm, "you are brutal. I think I may be plain. Do you fancy I have been blind? That I did not understand, long ago, your good mother's wishes? For two years I have lived in that lonely place, and you wrote to me perhaps once or twice, at the New Year, or to convey an invitation of the family's. Suddenly you have found me—I shall be quite as brutal as you, for I know how the world looks at me—you find me free, marriageable. Do you imagine a woman like me, any woman,

would not be lonely down there? Do you think I can or could put faith in any man, any woman, now? Well, I can—but in those people down there, and they are the only ones. It is my habit of life, and the habit of life is the strongest bond in the world. It keeps man and wife together, or it keeps them apart. It keeps us apart.

"Now I want to go back there to those simple, common people who make the days worth going through. You, Victor, have —oh, you have everything, and to play with. Mine is a different game. I've done with play—so long, long ago."

"But I really do love you—the first time in my life I've really loved any woman," he protested ardently.

"I do not blame you for what you have been. I was not free, of course; but now that I am—well, Victor, it would take years to explain it all. I just can't see the matter as you would wish. From the outset I have let you be sure of my position. When, until to-day, have I gone with you anywhere alone?"

"You were not so sure against me until he appeared?"

"If you understood women as well as you believe you do, you would not have taken me for one who would say no in every thought and word, just for the pleasure of having the man persuade her the more. If I had ever loved you, you could not have failed to understand. You have refused to believe.

"And now, let me tell you about Mr. Avery. I had no idea he was to be here to-night. I would have avoided the meeting if it had been possible, for he has already had word that our acquaintance is at an end. I shall not see him again.

"I am going to my room. May I ask you to make my excuses to your mother? Say I have a headache—say anything."

"If I have been rude," he pleaded, detaining her, "it is only because I am madly in love with you. I forgot myself. Will you forgive me?"

She offered her hand: "Yes, Victor. *Adieu.*"

"*Adieu?*" he repeated in astonishment.

"Absolutely." She withdrew her hand.

"Then you do love him, after all," he said sullenly.

"You do not believe what I say." She smiled as she turned to go up the stairs. "It becomes ridiculous."

His brilliant black eyes were fixed upon her, as she mounted slowly and passed from his view unheeding.

Later, when Victor's mother went to the room of her guest, in much perturbation, she found Mme. de Lescure standing beside her open trunk. She was packing.

Mme. de Fesnières was astounded. Stéphanie was not going to leave them?

"I am deeply sorry, dear," said Stéphanie, "but after talking with Victor to-night, I do not think we would do well to meet, until it can be as mere friends. I shall go to-morrow for a few days with Eleanor de Guerville. Victor's behavior before Mr. Avery and to me was unmannerly, to say the least."

"He loves you so profoundly," said

the mother. "Besides, don't you think that gentleman rather odd? He never said——"

"That is not the question. Furthermore, I have known him for a short time only, and I shall not see him again."

The old woman was silent a moment, then asked pathetically:

"Will you permit me to offer my son's apology?"

"Please don't say anything like that," Stéphanie entreated, embracing her. "I am ashamed of myself to make you suffer. You have always been so good. Victor is quick-tempered, and sorry now, I suppose. Tell him I shall forget. My dear, I would do anything in my power for your happiness; but I shall always be the same toward him."

Mme. de Fesnières touched her eyes furtively with her handkerchief, insisting that she would send Berthe, the maid, to pack the trunk, and pleaded finally:

"You will come to see me alone, sometimes, Stéphanie? I am getting old. I

have loved you so, I have wished too much."

"Oh, surely!" and Mme. de Lescure kissed her affectionately.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### FLIGHT AND ALARMS

It was a miserable night Lloyd tried to sleep through; and he was glad when morning came, so he might send a note to the villa for Mme. de Lescure.

He wrote it after an early breakfast, and he had hardly sealed the envelope when he was called to the telephone. Eleanor de Guerville was talking, and she was full of reproaches because he failed to appear at the luncheon Margery Herbert had arranged to welcome her to Cabourg.

He made seven kinds of excuses, all of which she heard patiently, and then with quiet firmness informed him that he would never be in her good graces again, or in Margery's, if he did not come for luncheon to-day. Besides, her husband and the boys had arrived.

Margery joined her at the telephone, and between them they made it such a capital matter that he yielded. He told them, however, that he must return to Trouville directly after luncheon for a dinner engagement that could not be avoided.

He destroyed the note to Mme. de Lescure, in which he had begged the privilege of seeing her at four. He wrote another in which he asked her if he might call after dinner, and despatched it by a messenger. Her reply, he said, would find him at his hotel after four.

Randolph was asleep when he left. On examining the time-table, he found that he could catch a train half an hour in advance of the one on which he was expected. If he got to Cabourg sooner, they would give him luncheon at an earlier hour, and the sooner would he be back at Trouville.

He left a line to Randolph to open any note that might come for him, and to telegraph him or telephone him at Cabourg.

The line for Randolph greeted him at his late breakfast. He reasoned that something must have happened between Victor

and Lloyd last night, because Victor seemed much perturbed when, in reply to Randolph's inquiry, he said that Mr. Avery had decided suddenly he must go back to his hotel. When Randolph got home, there was no light in Lloyd's room, and as he was not about the hotel, Randolph judged he must be asleep. That he should hurry over to Cabourg this morning could mean only the old miserable question of the story Margery brought back from Vassilly. Without touching his breakfast he went to the telephone and called Margery.

"My erstwhile quiet and dreaming friend, Lloyd, is crazy," was his first statement after "good-morning."

"He's coming here to luncheon," she said.

"Well, he could still be crazy and do that——"

"What?"

"No, I don't mean it that way, Margery."

"Dear Randolph, I wish I knew what you meant, anyway."

"You know that farm girl story you got down in the country?"

"Yes."

"Well—er—it seems to be a little mixed up—that is, the version they gave you doesn't tally with Lloyd's version."

"Is that why you called me up?"

"Well—you see, Lloyd's quite sore about it, and I was afraid he'd butt in and make a fuss—don't you know?"

"So you're preparing me?"

"I guess that's what I mean—besides, I have bad news. Are you quite strong this morning?"

"Now, Randolph, stop fooling. What's the matter?"

"Say, Margery, honest, now, will you?"

"Haven't I told you 'No' often enough?"

"You don't mean to say you are afraid?"

"Of course not. What an idea!"

"Then I dare you to marry me!"

"Sh,—Ranney, you forget we're on the telephone."

"It's a French wire, sweetheart. It can't understand English."

All he heard was her musical laugh in reply.

"Is that a 'Yes' laugh?"

"Ranney, if you're going to talk like that, you'd best come and see me. Telephoning's expensive."

"But I'm afraid when I see you."

"Silly boy! Come to dinner to-night and we'll talk it over."

"Hooray!" Randolph cried into the receiver. "That's a promise, isn't it?"

He heard her laugh again, a faint "to-night, dear," and the sound of the receiver being hung up.

When the train stopped at Cabourg, Lloyd ran into the station to inquire whether a telegram or telephone message awaited him. There was no message.

He picked out a cab and told the driver to hurry to the hotel he named. The message might be there. He hoped not, much as he desired any word about Mme. de Lescure.

When he had given his name at the office, the clerk handed him a telegram, and began to say something about the de Guervilles. He heard only a distant jumble of words, as he tore the envelope and stared at the message:

"Lescure's gone. Victor's gone. You're gone. I'm nearly gone and can't wait.

"RANDOLPH."

Where? Where? Why had he not said where? Had Stéphanie and Victor gone together? He must find out at once. He asked the clerk to direct him to the telephone.

The clerk told him the way and continued: "If you please, monsieur, M. de Guerville and his sons are at the beach. Madame was here only a moment ago. She was going out with Mme. Herbert; but she did not go. She left word that you were to come to the suite when you arrived."

He paused. If he telephoned, no matter what reply he got from Randolph, he

could not act on it until he had seen Mme. de Guerville, at least for a few moments. He inquired about the next train to Trouville. The clerk consulted the time-table with irritating deliberation, and replied finally: "In fifteen minutes, monsieur."

"And after that?"

"Not till three o'clock, monsieur."

It would be better to go back to Trouville at once and find out all about her departure. Victor gone, too! To wait till three o'clock would be madness, luncheon or no luncheon. He must elaborate an excuse for the de Guervilles.

A servant conducted him to the de Guerville suite on the second floor. The door of the sitting-room was ajar, and the door swung open at his touch, as he announced: "M. Avery."

He crossed the threshold and stood stock-still.

She was standing by the window. It was impossible. He took a step forward. It could not be she.

Her eyes showed amazement, incredulity, alarm.

"Why do you come here?" she asked hoarsely.

He saw she was trembling. "To see the de Guervilles." He smiled. "That's honest."

"Mme. de Guerville will be back in a moment. She just went to get—you really know her?"

"Perhaps longer than you have. For ten years." He laughed lightly, or tried to. Her awe made him apprehensive.

"I can't remember," she faltered. "I've known her ever since I was a little girl, I think."

"Then you are their Stéphanie?"

In him a memory had awakened, of which she knew nothing. She gazed at him wonderingly now. He went toward her, took her hand.

"No," he added, "you are mine. You whom I have sought through the years."

She withdrew her hand quickly and shrank from him.

He caught her in his arms. All power seemed suddenly to abandon her. She

hid her face against his breast. She began to weep silently.

"Don't, please don't," he murmured.

"I came to Eleanor to get away from everybody," she sobbed.

"You must not try to get away from me," he said reassuringly. "It's no use."

He laid his hand against her feverish cheek.

"Don't you know," he went on softly, "that when you were a girl just out of the convent you said to Eleanor you meant to marry an American because he would be five times richer than a Frenchman?"

She laughed tearfully.

"I'm an American," he said, with all the meaning in the phrase of all the words of love and tenderness.

She looked up pleadingly. "You know everything, don't you? Please, then, understand, and don't speak like this again until——"

"Stéphanie!" he murmured.

Quietly as a ghost Mme. de Guerville appeared at the threshold of the next

room. She stared spellbound for an instant, and as quickly stole away.

"I know, I know," he said gently. He pulled off his ring. "Will you give it back to me when I may speak again?"

The eyes of amethyst looked surrender into his, and closed as she gave him her lips.

THE END